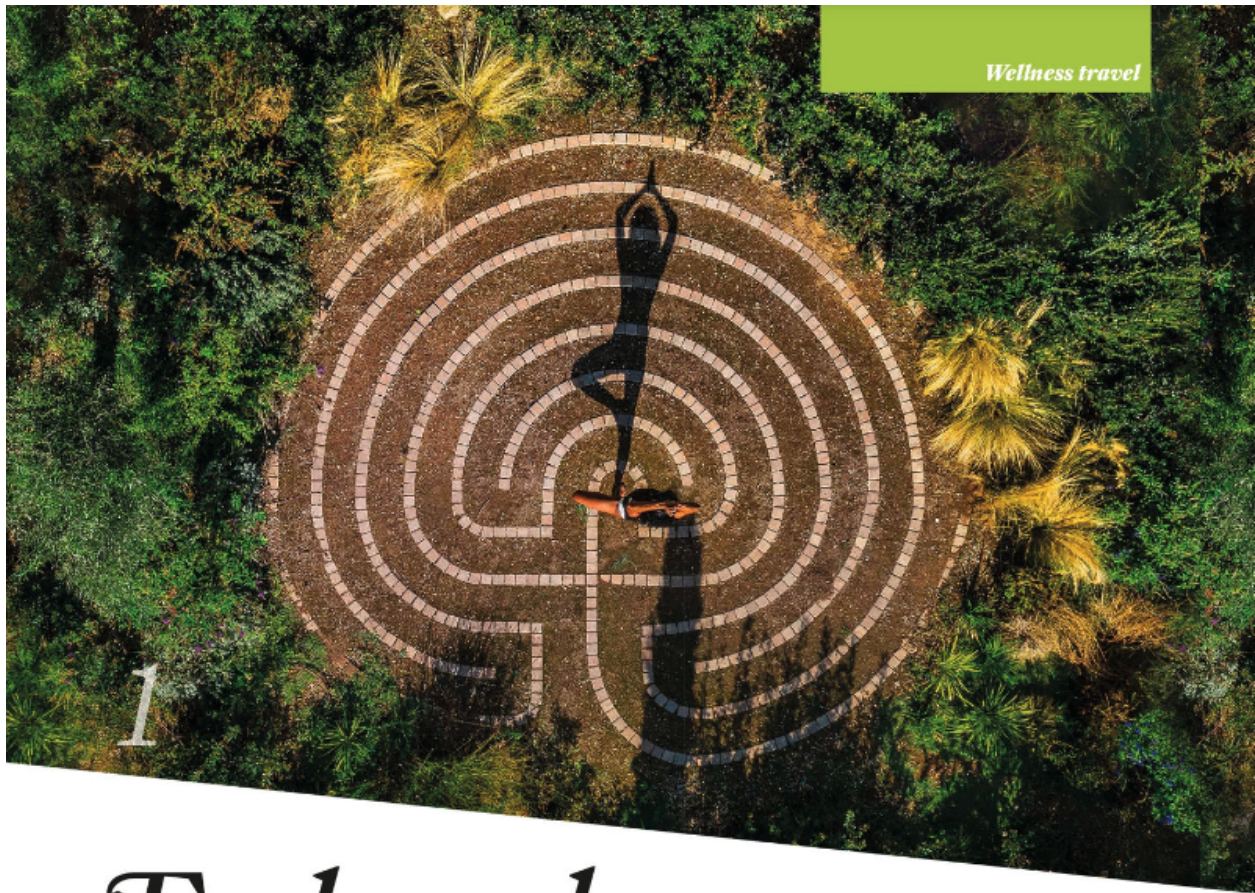

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NEW HORIZONS

Cruise has regained its crown as travel's fastest-growing sector, and it's an exciting time for the upscale end of the market as a number of lines and vessels make their debut

Plus: how to maximise your homeworking experience; the rise of the wellbeing sector; plus family holidays, all-inclusives, Greece, Japan, New Zealand, South America and Turkey



Wellness travel

Feelgood factor

From menopause retreats to biohacking and microdosing, wellbeing is being taken to new levels and holds post-pandemic appeal, with resorts ready to help guests feel whole again

AUTHOR: DEBBIE WARD

The spa and wellness sector is getting serious, shedding perceptions of pampering, heading in a more medical direction and – in doing so – attracting a wider demographic. While it's not yet mainstream for the trade, this fast-growing market does however offer great potential for earning commission on both clients' accommodation and their wellness package. A 2021 Mintel Wellness Traveller Market Report noted 79% of UK tourists are keen to add such activities to their regular holiday. Trade-friendly specialist Wellbeing Escapes notes wellness is having a "record year" with its early 2023 sales up on 2019. The health

■ “wake-up call” of the pandemic is a motivating factor believes founder and managing director Stella Photi, explaining wellness is largely “about preventative health”.

Among mainstream operators, Premier Holidays also notes surging demand. “Clients are asking more about wellness facilities and initiatives at hotels now rather than just whether there’s a spa and gym,” says product manager John Parker. “These can vary completely from healthier eating options and exercise facilities to individual wellness programmes, mindfulness sessions and morning yoga and meditation.” He adds: “There’s a definite association between wellness and luxury.”

Elegant Resorts launched a wellness collection this February, with 36 resorts featured on its website and in a dedicated brochure. Marketing assets, special offers and webinars are available through its new agent portal, a wellness event is planned and all future educational will include wellbeing elements.

Wellness clients’ motivations vary from destressing to recovering from serious illness, says managing director Lisa Fitzell. “Often the sole purpose of the holiday is going to tune up and do their annual health check. Even if they only go once, they’re taking something away they could bring into their lifestyle, and it could make a big difference to their future.”

She stresses it’s still a niche sector but adds: “Wellness is just part of luxury travel now in some ways, and you’re getting more agents that are getting savvier, going on a trip themselves then wanting to specialise.”

One such agent is fitness fan Helen Tustin, who founded Wellbeing Travel, part of appointment-only The Travel Lounge Penarth, just before the pandemic. Like Photi, she notes people’s increased post-pandemic desire to support their health but warns “the whole subject of wellness travel is a vast arena”, and that agents need a personal interest to truly specialise in the niche.

Most wellness requests for Premier Holidays come from couples wanting beach resorts, with Amatara Welleisure Resort, Phuket among good sellers. For Elegant Resorts, wellness clients are often 50-plus, typically women travelling solo or with a friend. Fitzell’s recent visit to Thailand’s Kamalaya revealed a demographic shift from a few years ago with young professionals under 38 overtaken by older couples. “I do think the [new] older generation are getting a lot more health conscious and more understanding of wellness,” she says. “Longevity is a really big theme for the wellness products we’re working with.”

Getting serious

In tandem with healthy ageing, both Fitzell and Photi highlight biohacking, using technology to assist health goals, as a key trend in higher-end spas. This can include vitamin intravenous drips, hyperbolic oxygen chambers and cryotherapy, with brief exposure to -85°C or lower to help relieve pain and inflammation.

Six Senses properties and Joali Being in the Maldives are among popular places with

biohacking treatments. Medical elements are notably also being adopted by heritage retreats such as Thailand’s Chiva Som, which has launched genomic testing, analysing DNA to flag up serious illness risk factors. Microdosing with psychedelic drugs is even bubbling under the mainstream with, for instance, Berkley Retreats offering Netherlands pop-ups.

Photi also sees more spas adding hormone and microbiome (gut health) testing. She says: “Testing and biohacking have been around for quite a while, but it’s exploded now. This is really at the luxury high end, where people are very interested in being the best version of themselves.” The science trend is also attracting more men who usually “have goals in mind”, she adds.

On the flip side, spirituality to aid mental healing is also in demand. “A lot of people were on the edge after the pandemic, not in a great emotional state,” explains Photi.

More open discussion around mental health has also helped draw wellness clients for Tustin and menopause retreats are seeing a similar effect. “It’s being discussed more... it’s a big growth sector,” she says. She has also noted families getting involved in wellness. “For the next generation it’s going to be huge,” she predicts.

Both Photi and Fitzell tip Thailand’s RAKxa Wellness & Medical Retreat as a particularly exciting newcomer. Fitzell says: “I was really impressed. Because it’s just outside Bangkok they’ve got access to so many health professionals. It’s five-star luxury, the accommodation standard is amazing, they’re all individual villas, and the area that it’s in is a

nature reserve. It’s a really good one to be tagged onto holidays, beginning and end.”

The wellness-focused resorts of Six Senses and COMO are perennial best sellers for Elegant Resorts, along with Kamalaya, Ananda in the Himalayas and Santani Wellness Resort & Spa in Sri Lanka. Asia’s comeback after a sluggish post-Covid reopening has certainly boosted trade wellness bookings, while Latin American retreats such as shaman-slanted Mexico’s Chable Yucatan, are starting to trend. In Australia, the Adelaide Hills region is heavily investing in wellness to help tourism recover from 2019’s bush fires.

Close to home

But wellness breaks needn’t mean going long-haul. Photi cites Palazzo Fuggi near Rome as a recent star, while Fitzell has high hopes for Lily of the Valley, near St Tropez, a rare beach-based European wellness product. “I expect Europe to be a lot bigger for us in future for wellness,” she says.

The UK is not immune to wellness trends either. Fairmont Windsor Park has embraced preventative and women’s health; OSKIA cryotherapy and oxygen facials are new at the Spa at Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London; while Northern Ireland’s Culloden Estate and Spa has a new partnership with the Holywood Private Clinic to offer chronic pain management, annual health checks, menopause clinics and mental health therapy. In Mid Wales, singer

Need to know

Round-up of the hottest wellbeing resorts and experiences from across the world

The Body Holiday St Lucia’s upcoming theme months include September Solos, with hosted dinners and dedicated fitness classes; October Yoga, featuring limitless lessons and special menus; and a pre-Christmas restorative break. thebodyholiday.com

Cayman Islands celebrity favourite **Palm Heights** (below) has launched its Garden Club Spa with alfresco bathing rituals, healing



ceremonies and treatments, midnight spa and social evenings. An athletics facility with sprint track and boxing ring will have residencies from world-class sportspeople. palmheights.com

Adults-only Lake Garda spa resort **Cape of Senses** opens on 8 July. The family-owned property has 55 suites with floor-to-ceiling windows, some with rooftop terraces. The spa uses natural, sustainably sourced products, while hiking tours, yoga and meditation are available. capeofsenses.com

Velaa Private Island in the Maldives has launched a new Wellbeing Village covering medical, osteopathy and ayurveda treatments, complemented by a detox restaurant. Medical sessions include blood analysis and IV therapy. velaaprivateisland.com

SHA Wellness Clinic in southern Spain has launched a Leader’s Performance programme, drawing on cognitive research to improve the productivity of those in high-stress positions. Treatments include infrared light therapy, ozone therapy and hormone supplementation. shawellness.com