

Wellness Trends 2014

- Guest surveys by wellness travel agency, beauty24 and Wellness-Hotels & Resorts show developments and trends for wellness travel.
- Hotel industry surveys among partner hotels, Wellness-Hotels & Resorts and beauty24 record the developments of the wellness hotel industry.

The wellness industry is optimistic for the coming season

Berlin, 5 March 2014. The industry's profits are growing as expected – but not as strong as in the past. According to a hotel industry survey, only 43 percent of the hotel industry has noticed revenue growth in 2013 – in contrast to the booming 2010 with almost 65 percent. Still, 58 percent expect growth in 2014 – however, in 2010 this value was much higher at almost 73 percent. Twenty years after the beginning of the wellness boom, the growth in profit has slowed down – some of the potential has been sapped. This is also reflected on the consumer side. After target groups were expanded in the last years – first men, then families – there are few new markets to develop. The actual growth in 2013 has less to do with new guests and more to do with the increased frequency of wellness visits.

But even though profit growth was not as encouraging as in previous years, the hotel industry survey of the wellness travel agency beauty24 and Wellness-Hotels & Resorts among the partner hotels has shown that 2013 was the year of investments. More than 85 percent of the hotel industry has invested in the remodeling and expansion of their hotels. “One notices a very clear, positive effect in the reduction of the VAT for the hotel industry”, explains Michael Altewischer, managing director of Wellness-Hotels & Resorts. And more investment is coming. Almost 80 percent of the hotel industry plans to invest in 2014 – interestingly enough, current investment is stronger for remodeling and adding hotel rooms than for the wellness area, which was primary in the investment ranking for many years up until 2010. “While in 2010 many hotels upgraded to wellness hotels, recently room capacity is being expanded, which means that the spa areas are regularly booked out”, summarized Roland Fricke, managing director of beauty24.

What can agents and guests expect in the 2014 wellness year? Which trends will emerge and which will fall by the wayside? Which tools will influence the guests' booking decisions and how is this relevant for the hotel industry? The survey by Wellness-Hotels & Resorts and beauty24 takes these questions into account.

1. The ambience is the essential factor for the feeling of well-being

In contrast to other types of holidays, guests spend more time in the hotel during a wellness trip. The ambience plays a greater role. It doesn't matter if the guests are in their 30s or over 60 – the more time the guest is in the hotel, the more value is placed on the atmosphere. On the average 95 percent agree, and even 98 percent of those under 29. When asked if a pleasant hotel atmosphere is essential to relaxation, 98.99 percent answered with yes. It couldn't be clearer! Roland Fricke: “The younger the guest, the more important the atmosphere – a look to the future clearly shows which direction the wellness industry is going.” Not only interior design and service are seen as crucial components for a pleasing atmosphere, but also a beautiful hotel environment. For 83.63 percent of guests, attractive landscaping, a garden or a park are either important or very important. Guests desire a complete feeling of comfort: it should be cosy and comfortable (important to very important for 62.56 percent), the rooms should be large and filled with light (71.07 percent) and, of course, smell good (86.22 percent). And what comes to mind? “The guest enters the lobby, first takes in the pleasant atmosphere, possibly even enjoying a refreshing scent of essential oils and then settles into a comfortable chair with a welcome drink, while the friendly service brings their luggage to the room. When the guest doesn't want to get up, then the welcome has gone successfully”, according to Roland Fricke.

Service before design sofas

Interior design is quite relevant: 42.80 percent think that special attention to interior design is important to very important. Furthermore, 24.27 percent consider areas with different atmospheres, such as Asian or Mediterranean, important or very important. Superficialities, such as designer furniture is, however, passé. A majority (66.39 percent) considers that to be less important to absolutely not relevant. “It’s about comfort, not designer sofas”, stated Michael Altewischer. Wellness guests especially long for warmth. That can be taken literally. For 94.53 percent, a comfortable room temperature has an important to very important influence on well-being. Interpersonal warmth plays the biggest role among all other factors. 95.60 percent of those asked stated that helpful, friendly service was important to very important. “The most important factor for the ambiance is the service. Friendly, helpful service is the key to relaxation for a majority of guests”, notes Michael Altewischer.

Anything but jazz

In addition to the delightful scents, cosy corners and a comfortable room temperature, music should not be forgotten. But which sounds should there be? 74.26 percent of those asked prefer natural sounds as a background for their wellness treatments. There was complete agreement when it came to what definitely should not be coming out of the speakers: only 4.04 percent could imagine themselves relaxing to jazz music. They would rather have no music at all, which was the preference for 4.92 percent. “Anything but jazz in the wellness area!”, said Michael Altewischer from Wellness-Hotels & Resorts with a smile. “Our hotels managers know that, too. Fewer than seven percent of the hotels play blue note sounds in their facilities.”

2. Online booking

The right feeling begins at the time of booking. The impression of the hotel and hotel’s atmosphere transmitted by the images on the website is a determining factor for 90.55 percent of the guests surveyed. Photos are the most important factor when deciding on a hotel, even more important than the design of the hotel’s website (important to very important for only 58.62 percent) and more relevant than the descriptive text (81.80 percent). A hotel that advertises with powerful and appealing images can increase the probability of receiving the booking. But there is another very significant point when deciding whether a hotel is booked or not: the transparency of the booking process. Almost 91 percent considered this to be important to very important. “The small print shouldn’t be printed too small, but rather transparently presented in the booking and cancellation process”, explains Roland Fricke of beauty24.

Certificates of assessment that test security and quality also play a major role for the final booking: 59.04 percent of surveyed guests stated that it was important or very important for them that hotel pages were associated with certificates of online portals in reference to the booking process.

3. Online reviews

True to the motto “Writing is silver, speaking is gold”, hotel reviews today are powerful tools in the tourism industry, but word-of-mouth recommendation is rated as much more important for a hotel. 73.12 percent of those asked trust the recommendations of friends and acquaintances when booking a wellness trip. “Personally exchanging experiences still ranks above anonymous reviews in the virtual world”, says Michael Altewischer. Online reviews influence the booking decisions of 61 percent of guests; in contrast only 8.52 percent rely on social networks when searching for booking recommendations.

Online review portals are also a very important tools for hotels. On the one hand, these portals help to estimate the satisfaction of the guests, on the other hand positive guests reviews are a valuable marketing instrument, which is why a majority of hotels motivate their guests to leave a written review online and then to actively evaluate both the positive and the negative comments. 75 percent comment on the reviews of their guests. And that’s a good thing, because the company’s reaction influences booking behaviour. “beauty24 has its own evaluation tool on the website, which emphasizes transparency and security. Only proven guests can evaluate a hotel. This pays off – for our customers and for us”, adds Roland Fricke. The current guest survey shows that hotel review portals are becoming even more important when guests are deciding where to book.

4. Short getaways instead of yearly adventures

For years now, people interested in wellness have been opting for more shorter trips during the year. The guest surveys show that in 2010 less than half of the guests took a wellness holiday more than once a year, but that figure rose to almost two-thirds in 2014. The group that went on multiple wellness trips during the year grew by more than 20 percent points to 57.41 percent and passed the “once-a-year wellness holidaymakers” with only 30 percent. “Our study, which we made with the GfK in 2012, has already shown that short trips are highly popular”, recalls Roland Fricke.

Especially in the wellness segment, the guests are interested in taking a time out. This was shown by 76.93 percent of the participants in the beauty24 guest survey. The maximum restorative effect can be reached when multiple, short time-outs are planned during the year. “A comparative study, published by the psychologist Dr. Verena C. Hahn in February 2014, has determined that short holidays have the same effect on relaxation as longer trips. Regular time-outs taken throughout the years are more effective than one long holiday”, added Roland Fricke.

5. Outdoor wellness gets sportier

“Outdoor wellness” became a new trend already two years ago. The survey results revealed that almost 50 percent of those asked were generally interested in outdoor wellness treatments. A more refined image emerges with the help of the current survey. Classic wellness offers, such as massage and cosmetic treatments outside, were increasingly requested by guests; however, the sportier variations were the clear winners. Guests associate outdoor wellness with physically demanding activities according to the latest experiences of hotel management. Hotels have noticed an increased demand especially for bike tours. Also Nordic Walking, guided hikes and outdoor courses for yoga and Pilates, where the body and the spirit are both activated, were more frequently requested in 2013 than in 2012. The hotels’ experience is backed by the numbers from the guests’ survey, where Nordic Walking, guided hikes and, in first place, bike tours (altogether 42.72 percent) led the 2013 list of outdoor wellness offers. 16.88 percent of guests stated that they were “in the saddle” during their wellness holiday.

The ideal complete package as regards relaxation is as follows: “Relax and pamper yourself indoors – get active outdoors.” The guests book classic beauty-, massage- and body treatment mostly indoors, but being active outdoors is also increasingly popular. “There is a clear potential for expansion within the hotel industry”, says Michael Altewischer of Wellness-Hotels & Resorts. “For 2014 15.38 percent of surveyed hotels were planning to expand their outdoor wellness facilities. The demand will only increase with the added services. And the good news is that it doesn’t cost the world to provide a couple of bicycles but it does improve the guests’ satisfaction”, adds Roland Fricke.

Details about the surveys

The hotel survey was conducted with 104 partner hotels of beauty24 and Wellness-Hotels & Resorts from January to February 2014. The guest survey about the 2014 wellness trends was conducted by beauty24 und Wellness-Hotels & Resorts from January to February 2014. It dealt with an online questionnaire from wellness guests about wellness trends in 2013. Sample n = 3,862 guests of beauty24.de and Wellness-Hotels & Resorts.

About beauty24 – Germany’s No. 1 for wellness online with the Trusted Shops seal of approval

beauty24 is one of the biggest organizers and agents for exclusive and high-quality beauty- and wellness trips in Germany, with a worldwide wellness travel offer including 8,000 well-being programmes in over 650 hotels, day spas and hot springs. beauty24 has been certified with the Trusted Shops seal of approval as a secure online shop since 2014. For beauty24 wellness travel is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle. Therefore, the company and its offer have stood for a healthy and sustainable life for many years. beauty24 wellness trips are available at beauty24.de, in TV and via direct sales. The wellness counselors are available for their customers from 9am–7pm at a free wellness travel hotline 0800/2400044 or by e-mail at service@beauty24.de. A high level of customer satisfaction is achieved through constant quality management. The company was founded in 2000.

About Wellness-Hotels & Resorts GmbH

The cooperation of Wellness-Hotels & Resorts is the first address for "Wellness im Hotel" and has been a leader of the German-speaking wellness hotel industry since 1997. Meanwhile, it belongs to the first pioneers of carefully selected, mostly owner-run German wellness hotels as well as international partners in the 4- and 5-star categories. Independent TÜV experts check the properties in the categories of the spaciousness, innovation and sustainability of the spa area.

The 10/2013 issue of the magazine "Stiftung Warentest" has given its seal of approval, the "wellness tree", one of the few helpful certificates on the market. The current catalogue is online at www.wellnesshotels-resorts.de and can be ordered on telephone at +49.(0)211.679 69 69.

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