

ASK THE EXPERTS

Brush up on your selling skills with tips on tapping into the wellness trend. **Katie McGonagle** reports



1 'Wellness is your own personal journey'

Stella founded Wellbeing Escapes in 2005, combining extensive experience in the travel industry with a mission to make health-focused breaks accessible to all. The company has doubled its agent business over the past year to around a fifth of total sales, offering down-to-earth advice on a range of wellbeing experiences.



Stella Photi,
founder and managing director,
Wellbeing Escapes

SHE SAYS

In a scenario like this, it's more important than ever that people are healthy and have good immunity, so my prediction is that interest in this type of holiday is going to increase.

It's still quite a niche market. You can go anywhere and have a spa treatment, but a wellbeing holiday takes you a bit deeper. It's one step beyond a spa holiday – it's more integrated. A lot of agents find it overwhelming because they feel like their client knows more than them, but in the last 18 months, our trade business has grown a lot as agents see more demand from their clients.

With wellness, it's very much a personal goal, so find out what's driving that client – how do they want to feel when they come back? A lot of people have a specific goal: they want to lose weight, get fit or improve their yoga. Ask whether they've done this type of holiday before, because someone who's never taken a wellness holiday before will have different expectations from someone who's been to the world's best retreats.

There's also much more of a focus on mental health and emotional wellbeing. When I started, everything was physical – losing weight and detoxing – but now people are more interested in learning how to meditate and restoring their mental health. Wellness is your own personal journey.

2 'Holidays and health now go hand in hand'

As senior product and purchasing manager for Kuoni, Sheena is one of the most well-travelled members of the senior team at Kuoni. She knows what it takes to sell luxury spa resorts and is responsible for seeking out new retreats around the world to include in the operator's spa and wellness collection.



Sheena Paton,
senior product and purchasing manager,
Kuoni

SHE SAYS

Holidays and health now go hand in hand and we've seen a lot of innovation at resort level in this area. Spas used to just offer a standard list of treatments, such as massages, manicures and pedicures, in fairly basic treatment rooms, but the whole area of spa and wellness has really taken off in recent years.

We are seeing more customers come to us who don't necessarily want a dedicated retreat or to be tied to a strict programme but do want access to classes, treatments and healthy menus alongside the rest and relaxation of their regular holiday.

As well as couples, we've seen more mums and daughters or girlfriends travelling together. Wellness holidays also suit solo travellers.

There are some real standout resorts in our collection. The Banyan Tree Samui in Thailand is outstanding, and the Spa Village Tembok in Bali offers great-value inclusions. The BodyHoliday in Saint Lucia includes spa treatments as part of the stay, with sport, yoga and relaxation classes. Or you can do what most do and have a healthy breakfast, have your free spa treatment, followed by a boozy lunch and afternoon in the sun with cocktails!

3 'Spas aren't just wheatgrass shots and vegan meals'

Since joining Six Senses in 2011, Mark has played a key role in launching wellness initiatives across the brand's portfolio, as well as leading on spa operations and development. The company, part of the InterContinental Hotels Group, manages 18 hotels and resorts plus 30 spas in 21 countries worldwide.



Mark Sands
vice-president of wellness,
Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas

HE SAYS

Spa and wellness holidays promote good healthy habits, from the food you eat and the exercise you do to mindfulness and sleep, that you can take home and integrate into your life.

This is a different market to the usual holiday travel. Agents should ask questions and offer pre-arrival contact with the on-site wellness practitioners – this will ensure clients get the personalised attention they deserve.

There are many preconceptions that agents worry about. Firstly, wellness and spa holidays are not just for solo travellers – there are options for couples or groups of friends. There's a trend of professionals using these breaks to improve themselves or re-energise after burning out.

Secondly, these holidays are as important to men as women. We are seeing more men and kids coming to our spas. We recently opened our first Kids' Spa within the Six Senses Spa Mumbai and it's exciting to see how our classes get kids actively learning how to use homegrown herbs, fruits and even old coffee grounds to make products we then use on them in the treatments.

Spa and wellness holidays do not need to be wheatgrass shots and vegan meals with no sight of a glass of wine. It is about that balance of making them fun, informative, transformative and realistic.