

White Paper

APSWC ROUND TABLE 2021

15th – 17th March 2021, A Virtual Event

Asia Pacific Spa and Wellness Coalition

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The APSWC Round Table was originally scheduled to be an in-person event in Tokyo, Japan, but due to the ongoing global pandemic we pivoted to an online event, with the technical support of The Deltus, Kuala Lumpur. We are currently planning to hold a Round Table in Japan in 2023.

Foreword

This White Paper seeks to give guidance to all industry stakeholders on issues faced by the industry, current and future. It seeks to be an authoritative guide designed to inform concisely about industry issues and their perceived solutions. Penned from the collective comment and input of industry professionals from 18 countries at the APSWC's first ever Virtual Round Table, March 2021, held online in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The White Paper is targeted to help all stakeholders, industry and government.

The release of this paper reflects the ability of the APSWC to bring together key leaders with the singular objective of facing up to the realities that the industry faces today. We as an industry take ownership of the paper, but it is up to individual stakeholders to take action in order that this document achieves its intended value.

The paper is not created simply to validate the discussions, but rather to be a catalyst for action once the key issues and the steps to be taken are identified. Some issues can be resolved with a bit of hard work and commitment by individual operators or business owners, while others require the input or assistance of third parties. It is, naturally, up to us as stakeholders to proactively request that assistance.

As reported in the Global Wellness Economy Monitor 2018, the Asia Pacific region had over 92,000 spas and hot springs, generating a combined annual revenue in excess of USD58 billion, with a workforce of over 2,000,000 persons (spas almost 900,000; hot springs 1.2M). The global pandemic has severely impacted these numbers with unofficial reporting of 30 – 50% of spa businesses being closed (at least temporarily) as of early 2021.

Given the reliance that our industry has on human resources it essential that we face up to the impact of today's world on the mental wellbeing of both our staff and our customers and the role that we have to play in this matter.

Sustainability in terms of business viability as well as via commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals remains a challenge for many, but now is the chance to review and reset, potentially creating a very different spa business model for tomorrow.

Looking forward to meet again in Da Nang, Vietnam for the next APSWC Round Table in March 2022.

Andrew Jacka
Chairman
Asia Pacific Spa & Wellness Coalition

APSWC



ASIA PACIFIC

SPA & WELLNESS COALITION

The Asia Pacific Spa & Wellness Coalition (APSWC) is a not-for-profit organization officially registered in Singapore in July '07. The result of an informal roundtable where spa and wellness industry professionals from across the region gathered in Singapore in May '06, it seeks to map out a development strategy to improve and promote the spa industry for the benefit of all. Originally established as a bridging mechanism across national spa associations, the base has grown to be more representative of the region, now even encompassing countries where no industry associations exist. It offers a one-size-fits-all membership model for all stakeholders and those interested in the industry, be they individuals, companies or organizations. The current board has members based in Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Singapore and Thailand.

In an increasingly digitalized world, the APSWC calendar is being constantly reviewed with webinars and online discussion platforms to keep members and the broader industry abreast of the latest knowledge and educational opportunities available.

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APSWC Round Table

Senior managers and key decision makers from all aspects of the spa and wellness industry, including senior spa directors and managers, owners, suppliers, trainers and educators, allied health professionals, wellness consultants, government officials and media, are invited for this annual gathering. It is designed to be a 'by invitation' event for industry and government, with a 'white paper' outcome. The format gives all participants the opportunity to offer input, provide guidance and ensure the output is a 'voice of the people'.

There is no grandeur – this is about organic discussions and real issues. The Round Table is expected to evolve in future years into a multi-day educational event with workshops and presentations, and open to all levels of the industry.

An interactive event with presentations and active dialogue, it is an opportunity for regional players to network and discuss current issues with industry peers, while addressing the content of the white paper. APSWC events have a record of attracting delegates from multiple countries across the region.

Part One: The Realities of Mental Wellbeing

The wellness industry is waking up to wellness for our managers and our practitioners. We seek to help with the mental wellbeing of our clients but what can we do to ensure the mental wellbeing of those that deliver the services?

Background: With the increasing number of deaths worldwide, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is a dingy reminder to mankind as to how fragile our life is. From the Justinian Plague of 541 A.D to The Black Death of 1350, the First Cholera Pandemic of 1817 to the Spanish Flu of 1918 we have come a long way. Announced officially as a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11th March 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak, and the new normal hereafter, has had enough said about it. At this end, it has been a massive blow to the spa and wellness industry especially in Asia-Pacific.

The Round Table participants offered realizations to the aforementioned, to wit:

- (1) Humans are realizing that healthier and better living conditions need to be a focus going forward. Thus, the wellness put their health and wellbeing at the core of their travel experience. The demand for establishments that can cater to such needs will only grow as we emerge into the new normal and as the middle class, especially in Asian markets, expands.
- (2) The spa and wellness industry together form an ecosystem, wellness will enable us to lead a healthy lifestyle ensuring wellbeing for our mind and body. As this consciousness of the need for wellness and healthy living becomes integrated into our daily lives, the wellness sector will have to

expand and work on its already existing offerings of goods and services to accommodate growing demand in times to come especially post COVID-19.

- (3) Under COVID-19, heavy restrictions on travel and movement, social-distancing norms and mass-hysteria stemming from the contagiousness of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the spa and wellness industry finds itself perched precariously on the edge of a cliff. A ray of hope for the industry is that the very virus that is causing consumers to steer clear of spas is on the other hand driving them towards a healthy and wellness-oriented lifestyle. Therefore, in order to stabilize, the spa industry that relies heavily on human contact will need to reinvent itself by a high degree.
- (4) In the medium to long term, one outcome of the COVID-19 outbreak that will take center stage will be the changing age demographic in the consumer base for the wellness industry including spas, whether stand alone or at hotels and resorts. From the current risk-averse, upwards of 38 years of age spa user for example the new target audience for spas and other wellness offerings will probably range from 28 to 30 years of age and older. This shift in age demographic is primarily a result of risk-aversion setting in at younger ages as well as a greater consciousness of holistic health and lifestyle in these age groups.

The delegates RESOLVED a central direction so as to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in regards to the spa and wellness industry. The mindset direction is all about responsibility of the wellbeing of all stakeholders in the industry. These stakeholders include managers, employees, clients of the industry including other social agents such as academic institutions and legal entities like governments. Their efforts and initiatives in rebuilding and positively responding to COVID 19 with a "business as usual" attributes in the industry would require cooperation, complementation and contribution by everyone.

How can each stakeholder partake in the process of cooperation, complementation and contribution? The RTD offered the following suggestions:

(1) MANAGERS and EMPLOYEES

- a. **Hygiene and Sanitation:** The physicality of the spas and wellness facilities will have to be relooked at to earn the trust of the clientele during and post COVID-19. Sanitizers will become the new tabletop centerpiece and face masks and gloves will be in use by all staff, probably more than to our liking but certainly as a necessity. Personal hygiene checks of the staff will be of utmost importance as this will distinguish the better spa facilities from the rest. These checks may include regular monitoring of body temperature, doctor's certification of health, etc. The quality of water and air-conditioning purification and circulation systems will have to be top-notch to ensure that customers are at ease.
- b. **Digitization:** The current lull in business is the perfect opportunity for spas to digitize and ramp up their platforms. Developing apps would be beneficial to reach the masses and digital marketing will be more important than ever before.
- c. **Well-Being Services:** The spa and wellness industry is bound to get overwhelmed with the rise of cases in depression, sleep disorder, stress, and poor mental health during and post COVID-19. Spas can explore services relating to and focusing on mental well-being. Online consultation sessions are a great way to start that can gradually transition to online therapy.
- d. **Renewed Social Responsibility:** The new normal under COVID 19 is about social responsibility. Change is happening in the mindset of many, as we come to recognize the role our actions play in helping to contain COVID-19. The disease has taught us one thing that under this current crisis, we

need to be more appreciative and give empathy toward one another. And social responsibility can be achieved if we value the health and wellness of every human being.

(2) ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

The academic institutions would play an important role in assisting the spa and wellness industry under COVID 19. Depression, stress, sleep deprivation and fear of contagion will continue to exist. Coping strategies will need to be put in place in the strategies that would include the following designs for:

- a. **Mindfulness:** During the current pandemic, there is so much uncertainty concerning the future, and many threats to our security (physical, social, emotional, and financial). It is totally natural and normal to feel anxious, fearful, and frustrated. Mindfulness is something we can all cultivate, by paying attention to our experience of the present moment, which includes our body sensations, emotions, and thoughts.
- b. **Meditation:** Academic institutions can assist the spa and wellness industry in securing evidence base interventions for mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). These interventions has the potential to complement treatment modalities in the industry.
- c. **Nutrition:** Proper nutrition and hydration are vital in combatting COVID 19. Academic institutions can lend a hand in online nutrition advising and counseling for clients of the industry.
- d. **Digital Detox:** More than ever, all of us are going to be spending a lot more time on screens than we may really want to over the next few weeks and months. We will particularly want to make good use of all the technology available to keep in touch and feel connected to our loved-ones. By doing so, academic institutions can encourage the industry to develop application tools using this kind of technology and other social

media platforms. We offer our clients all possible ways to connect with them and let them know that we care about them and their state of wellness.

(3) GOVERNMENTS

The role of government in preventing the spread of COVID 19 is to screen, contain (suppress) and mitigate the disease in the society. This is a public health issue. However, this is a developmental as well, as it covers socio-cultural, psychological, political and economic dimensions. The delegates opined on the following suggestions:

- a. **Shifting the Paradigm:** On one hand, COVID-19 pandemic has increased inactivity, stress, and anxiety among us as lockdowns and layoffs heighten isolation, uncertainty, and economic hardships. On the other hand, wellness involves the pursuit of activities that lead to holistic health, happiness, and well-being. Thus, governments must be able to put in place a shifting of paradigm that is – develop wellness measures across a range of policy domains to include a healthy built environment, public infrastructure, healthy diet and nutrition, and a safe and healthy work environment. Policy directions and programmatic designs are much needed under this pandemic.
- b. **Regulations:** COVID 19 made a big dent in the service deliveries of spa and wellness agencies. There is a need to visit existing policies and programs to ensure adaptive regulations in order to achieve sustainability for the spa and wellness industry. More importantly, we would like to see the industry as a relevant industry in the changes of time and space, **including an acknowledgement that the spa and wellness industry is not just for 'entertainment' but has a tangible role to play in preventive health-care.**

Part Two: Responsible Sustainability in Spa & Wellness

We are all responsible for doing what we can to protect the planet's resources and ensure that we have a sustainable world for the future. How can the spa & wellness industry as a preventive healthcare provider ensure that we play our part?

Issue: COVID 19 has made a huge impact on the services being rendered by the spa and wellness industry in Asia and the Pacific. However, this unfortunate event may offer opportunities for us to address framework conditions and imperatives for the industry with an in view to prioritize the concept of wellness resilience. Resilience-oriented market framework is described within the fields that affect strategic positioning and product policy of the spa and wellness industry. By doing so, we could affect sustainability.

The challenge before us is to what extent the present and future crises can be absorbed by established business models and related organization of the value chain. How can we respond to the concern of sustainability?

The COVID19 perspective for the wellness industry and tourism is strongly associated with building on the multi-dimensional quality of resilience thus, addressing to a “resilience-oriented market framework for tourism”. In this context, the key driving forces for tourism development have to be adapted both to the previously relevant long-term market trends and to the recent changes in market conditions caused by the COVID-19 drivers. This adaptation leads to an extended framework for strategic orientation of spa and wellness companies.

The participants offered the following options to achieve wellness resilience in the industry:

- 1. Encourage digital detox and/or transformation:** This is a period of time during which a person refrains from using electronic devices such as smartphones or computers, regarded as an opportunity to reduce stress or focus on social interaction in the physical world. Aiming to reduce stress and anxiety caused by the over-use of technology, digital transformation re-focuses offline social interactions and actions. Thus, re-connecting with nature. Increasing mindfulness.
- 2. Undertake collaboration with governments:** Today is the best time to work closely with governments to partner in policy development and programmatic designs for spa and wellness industry.
- 3. Develop Future-Fit Bench markers:** The industry should be able to develop a strategic management tool for companies and investors to assess, measure and manage the impact of their activities relative to COVID 19.

Round Table Participants

This participant list includes those that requested an invitation or whom automatically received them as an APSWC Member, plus those who submitted pre-recorded presentations, so should be seen as an indicative list rather than a true representation.

Abhilash.K.Ramesh, Kairali Health Resort, India; Alexandra Sutopo, Bali Spa & Wellness Association, Indonesia; Asst. Prof. Alisa Ritthichairoek, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand Alyssa Lim, Spa Consultancy Asia, Malaysia; Andreas Blum, The Art of Cryo, Germany; Andrew Jacka, Spa Origins Co., Ltd., Thailand; Angelyn Lim, Goldian Trading Pte. Ltd, Singapore; Atho De La Cruz, Aqua Spa, Philippines; Ayu Mudiasih, Cemara Ayu, Malaysia; Barry White, Thia Wellness , Hong Kong; Charles Davidson, Peninsula Hot Springs, Australia; Chea Sarin, Champei Wellness, Cambodia; Cici Zhong, Asia-Pacific Institute For Hydrotherapy and Climatotherapy Tourism, China; Datin Jeanette Tambakau, Association of Malaysian Spas, Malaysia; Donald Cha, Meraki Wellness Retreat, Nepal; Datin Dorothea Justin, Malaysian Association Wellness & Spa, Malaysia; Drona Dewi, Drona Wellness, Malaysia; Faheem Ebrahim, Xin Performance, Hong Kong; Goto Yasuaki, Onsen Medical Science Research Centre, Japan; Jaravee Kamolsiripichaiporn, IplusQ Co., Ltd., Thailand; Kevin Maes, IBS Beauty Co., Ltd., Thailand; Khem Bahadur Dhama, Tranquility Spa, Malaysia; Kristian Toivanen, VAMED, Thailand; Assoc. Professor Laufred Hernandez, University of Philippines, Philippines; Laura Ell, Laura Ell Consulting, Canada; Linda Harding Bond, Moontide Consulting, USA; Lucy Brialey, Sustainable Spa Association, United Kingdom, Norliza Othman, Malaysian Association Wellness Trainers, Malaysia; Phattiraporn Khiewsanun, Milkline Co. Ltd., Thailand; Samantha Dunn, Healthy Highs Pty Ltd., Australia; Sanjay Lama, Amantran Spa & Salon, Nepal; Shanaz Mohamed, My Natural Wellness, Malaysia, Sheinette Ivy Gonda, Naman Retreat, Vietnam; Shin Ishida, Japan Health & Research Institute, Japan;

Shirley Hasmani Eddie, Rafflesia Wellness Sdn Bhd, Malaysia; Susan Stein, Jari Menari, Indonesia; Suzie Adrina Ahmad, Resort World Genting, Malaysia; Tamara Brnelic, Six Senses, Maldives; Tek Makara, Champei Wellness, Cambodia; Thuy M. Do, Wellness Vietnam, Vietnam; Tomoaki Okada, Nippon Spa Association, Japan; Tomomitsu Ko, Pacific Hospitality Group Co., Ltd., Japan; Tomonori Maruyama, Mitsui Knowledge Industry, Japan; Trent Munday, OneSpaWorld, Malaysia; Tsuguru Dobashi, Nippon Spa Association, Japan; Woon Hoe Lee, Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts, Singapore

Gratitude

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