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ITALIAN INSPIRATION

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Healing: the new zeitgeist?

European Spa heads to the Healing Summit 2017 in Berlin to hear how a more humane approach could positively impact on hospitality and wellness businesses

REPORT BY SARAH CAMILLERI

This year's Healing Summit, which took place in March, saw 115 international delegates participate in a unique two-day programme exploring how healing practices could transform our approach to business and life. Held at the elegant Rocco Forte Hotel de Rome in the heart of Berlin, the Summit attracted a diverse mix of hospitality and wellbeing professionals, holistic practitioners, social enterprise and sustainability specialists, as well as spa product developers.

Under the theme of 'Building a global healing business community' delegates enjoyed speaker presentations and actively participated in meditation and yoga stretch sessions, networking and breakout discussion groups as part of a proactive and open agenda.

The event's host, US journalist and brand strategist Valerie Smaldone, welcomed delegates with some personal insights on the power of authenticity before introducing a diverse range of speakers, including wellness consultants; leadership, meditation, product development and hospitality professionals; and healing arts, social enterprise and not-for-profit specialists.

The happiness paradox

Co-owner and medical director Dr Mariela de Silveira, from the Kurotel Longevity Medical Center & Spa in Brazil, highlighted the stress caused by a lack of "self-worth" in today's society. Drawing from her experience in devising wellness programmes to help guests live longer, healthier and more meaningful lives, she revealed that the pursuit of happiness could be the root of much internalised stress.

"Happiness is a social paradox we need to understand better to improve our self-worth and connection with healing," she stated. "Our constant search for happiness, or pleasure, means finding chemical pathways to trigger endorphin release. Triggers such as sugar, alcohol and even constantly checking our social media, are all addictive," she added. "I am not saying



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Anne Biging and Dr Elisabeth Ixmeier
co-founders, Healing Summit

that seeking pleasure is bad, but we need to be more aware of why we are doing it."

De Silveira asked delegates to consider their own self-worth before serving others, be that in spas or other people-focused businesses. "Our self-worth is very much connected to healing the world. We all have a special remedy to offer others," she assured.

Communicating sustainability

The founder of STAMBA Superfoods, Asa Siegel, discussed how digital advances are switching consumers onto sustainability. "Socially Responsible Investment is the fastest growing sector in investment," he claimed, citing how a new generation of apps are helping consumers make informed purchasing decisions.

One such app, HowGood, rates sustainable food suppliers in the US and helped generate 136 million sustainable food purchases in 2016.

"Through their transactional behaviour people can now contribute. Today, a business's

sustainability rating really does impact on sales as more consumers reward good," said Siegel. "This trend will completely change the way that the business world works," he predicted.

He asked delegates to consider the power of communicating "doing good" to generate new connections. "Look at all your business activities to see how you can bring and communicate sustainable, beneficial aspects to all your practices. You will then be contributing to a beneficial and beautiful cycle. Small efforts can make a significant impact," he concluded.

Work with intention

Storytelling highlights at the Summit included Margot Esser-Greineder, founder of natural cosmetics company Pharmos Natur Green Luxury, who recounted a life-changing accident she suffered in the 1980s, which left her with serious burns to the face and torso. Esser-Greineder's recovery involved an extensive programme of daily aloe vera treatments that allowed her skin to regenerate itself without scarring. This experience prompted her to study natural and herbal medicine and create her own plant-based formulations to deliver healing.

She also drew delegates' attention to the growing appreciation of the biophilia effect. "If you spend just two hours in a wood, you will increase your T cells by 50%. This healing, biophilia effect helps to connect us back to nature," she said. "People are becoming more and more sensitive to higher energy. Holistic thinking is the way to heal ourselves and connect to nature. Plants are sacred and can help to connect heart and mind." ▷

1. Stretching sessions to open the body and mind
2. Rupert Schmid of Biologique Recherche
3. Leadership coach Velleda Dobrowolny and Carina Preuss, general manager of Ayurveda Parkschlösschen
4. The Summit's organising team with *European Spa* editor Sarah Camilleri (far right)
5. Shankara's Gina Preziosa
6. Dr Mariela Silveira of Kurotel Longevity Medical Center and Spa
7. NextLevel Leadership's Catherine Parrish talks to delegates



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▷ **Conscious beauty**

Gina Preziosa, vice-president of sales and marketing for Shankara, an Ayurvedic face and body line, shared its vision to donate 100% of net profits to humanitarian causes, through the International Association for Human Values (IAHV.org). Describing their products as “made with love” in an ashram in India, she revealed the reverence placed on every aspect of production and ingredient sourcing. “All our products contain divine ingredients and are blessed before they leave the plant. We also donate 100% of our profit to good causes. Two years ago we helped provide 10,000 school lunches in Jamaica,” she said. “Some people do not know about the power of intention in our products, but they can certainly feel it.”

A meditation on science

Dr Marjorie Woollacott, Emerita Professor of Neuroscience, University of Oregon, US, and author of *Infinite Awareness – the Awakening of a Scientific Mind*, gave an eloquent talk on how, as a scientist, she has dedicated her time to

quantifying the positive impact meditation can have on life, health and leadership.

Woollacott’s research, funded by the US National Institute of Health and National Science Foundation, has included extensive neuroscientific research into the efficacy of modalities such as Tai Chi and meditation. “Our own lab has found that meditation improves our attention and ability to focus – it also reduces stress and improves our emotional wellbeing,” she told delegates. “This is a critical time in our history. More and more leaders are calling for a fundamental shift to foster compassion to ourselves, others and the planet. Our isolation of separation needs to be healed through meditation and more inter-connectivity.”

Tap into soul luxury

“Emotion is the new currency in a transformational economy,” claimed Claudia Roth, founder of Soul Luxury, who brought together a well-received panel of experts to discuss trends in health, spa and wellbeing.

Focusing on how to reach a new generation

of wellness travellers, Stella Photi, founder of Wellbeing Escapes, said: “In 2007, our clients wanted to book packages that would help them ‘look more beautiful’ or ‘be thinner’. This language has completely changed. They are looking for transformational packages – ways to become ‘a better me’. They say ‘teach me’, ‘help me.’”

Photi highlighted a growing demand for therapeutic rest, digital detox packages and tailor-made fitness and healing. “Emotional healing is a huge demand,” she explained. “Heartbreak Healers is one of the most clicked-on areas of our website. People now want to go to nurturing environments where they can take care of themselves. They also appreciate they are going to live longer and have raised their awareness to seek education for an active, improved second part of life.”

Health-driven hospitality

Panelist Samantha Foster, development director of Destination Spa Management, highlighted the trend for personalisation at wellbeing



1. Catherine Parrish of NextLevel Leadership
2. Destination Spa Management's Joy Menzies and founder of JS Foundation Karen Christiaens Ph.D
3. Iyengar yoga teacher Nikki Costello leads an 'Opening the Body' session
4. Meditation practice provided a mindful dimension to the Summit
5. Wellbeing Escapes' Stella Photi and Summit host Valerie Smaldone
6. RoyAlp de Villars' Philippe Attia and Margot Esser-Greineder of Pharmos Natur Green Luxury
7. Dr Tanya Pergola shares her work to represent indigenous Tanzanian tribes in a delegate focus group



destinations and urged spas to lead their staff through the use of better protocols.

"Take time to look at your facilities and consider the emerging well building standards [LEED Certification and Delos WELL Building Standard]," she added, "to make our wellbeing places and spaces better to be in and work in."

Foster also highlighted many new emerging partnerships that are providing exciting new guest experiences. "We can always offer unique experiences for our guests. Look at the culture of your location, what is special, that you can package up? Consider developing specialist packages for seniors, for health or to meet disease-specific demand."

Heartfelt leadership

There were many memorable takeaways from the Summit, particularly the life-affirming wisdom shared by humanitarian Catherine Parrish, who has dedicated her life to improving infant mortality rates and the quality of life for people living in conditions of extreme poverty. Now president of NextLevel Leadership, Parrish

teaches companies, universities, not-for-profit organisations and foundations to "play their best game for a world that works for everyone".

Summit host Valerie Smaldone echoed this message with her compelling words on the power of authenticity in business and life.

Elsewhere, Julie Bach, chair of Global Wellness Initiative's Wellness For Cancer (wellnessforcancer.com), shared her dedication to change the perception of spa businesses towards cancer. "Cancer is a global issue for the spa and wellness industry," she stated. "Think about how your brand can show up, to help people with cancer. Spas can help people make positive lifestyle choices and we need more spas to participate."

Building a healing community

Overall, the Healing Summit did not deliver a business-focussed programme, but what it did effectively was to challenge the status quo and deliver a heartfelt and life-affirming agenda. 'Healing', as we know, has a myriad of different meanings, but most delegates appreciated time

away from their businesses to share experiences with other like-minded individuals.

"We wanted to create an event that was pure in its intention, not driven by any agenda, nor a money-making machine," said Anne Biging, co-founder of the Summit.

"The Healing Summit is a chance to really serve people who are seeking to explore and develop their outlook. Our event is for everyone who wants to learn to run their business according to the highest values that also bring healing into the world."

According to Biging, it is business – not politics – that can change the world. "Our Summit is very alive and energetic. We are exploring ways we can contribute and how we can define our message, to reach out to businesses," she concluded.

"The Healing Summit has created a global healing business community where everyone can inspire and learn from each other and also find new, successful partnerships in all parts of the world."

www.healingsummit.org