

Printed from : The Leisure Media Co Ltd

06 Jun 2016

Spas must think beyond design, says GOCO's Clive McNish

BY Jane Kitchen



Spas spend a lot of money on thermal experiences, but according to Clive McNish, general manager of GOCO Hospitality, it's important to think beyond design and consider how the guest will interact with your spa. In an exclusive Thought Leader column for *Spa Opportunities*, McNish explores why it's important to remember that your guests might not have a thorough understanding of spa culture.

Grinning and 'baring' it all, by Clive McNish

Spa developers today spend tens of thousands of dollars installing the latest and greatest thermal experiences (the posh phrase for what we all used to call the sauna and steamroom). It's true that you can't open a spa without the 'hero shot' of a model delightfully draped across the inside of your hammam or sauna while the pin spotlights twinkle in the ceiling. But what is the guest experiencing in your thermal area?

Frankly, for most, it is an uncomfortable tiptoe between wondering what to wear and hoping that no one sits next to you. A sauna or steamroom 'designed' for eight is realistically going to be used by four at most – unless the eight are intimately acquainted or don't mind being so.

Once in the area, guests are left to be guided around your huge investment by the rotund cartoon people of an infographic that has not changed much since the 1970s. How long should I stay? What order should I experience things in? Why am I standing among a group of people I don't know wearing only a smile?

In a recent trip to central Europe, I entered a thermal area which was declared to be 'German Style' – roughly translated that means all in and all off! The guests were totally natural and moved with purpose between the experiences on offer. I felt that the main reason why this worked was the understanding of why they were there and that to enjoy this experience, clothing was not only frowned upon

but also forbidden (one newcomer, English I think, was politely tapped on the shoulder and given the brief that the briefs should be removed).

Clearly, cultural differences and our own personal views on the world will always mean that the 'same' experience will vary depending where we are, but as spa operators, we must make sure our guests are comfortable, educated and fully understand what we are offering.

Then they can get on with the business of enjoying those facilities that we spent so much money on – rather than fearing the whoosh of the door as the rubber seal is broken and a total stranger appears through the mist – having fully read the dress code, which your guest misread because his glasses were back in his locker.

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