



GREAT *expectations*

As **Goco Spa** opens at the UAE's Ajman Saray hotel, spa director **Rishi Bharadwaj** tells Professional Spa & Wellness about the concept behind and offering within it

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For us, the spa is not just a minor operating department (MOD), it's a unique selling point in itself," says Rishi Bharadwaj, spa director at the recently opened Goco Spa at the Ajman Saray in the UAE. "We don't just have a spa because we feel we have to; it's a fully-fledged department and we're very serious about our concept and services and about really taking care of our guests," he explains of the 1,200sq m spa, which soft opened on March 1 and which is scheduled to open officially later this month.

The spa at Ajman Saray, part of Starwood Hotels and Resorts' The Luxury Collection group of hotels, is the first location to open under the new Goco Spa brand. Thailand-based Goco Hospitality has a history of creating and managing spas for high-end hospitality and leisure groups around the world but this marks the company's first own-brand spa. Recognising the value of the spa to the hotel was,

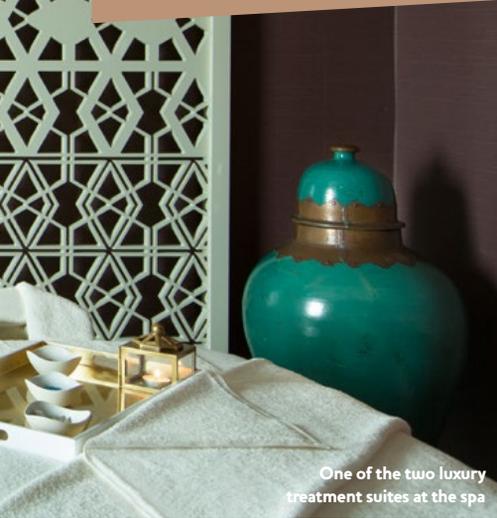


Bharadwaj says, one of the key reasons Starwood chose to work with Goco. "The owners wanted a company that specialises in spa, that really understands both the concept behind and the operational aspects of running a spa."

Staff strength

The spa features 17 treatment rooms; eight for women, seven for men and two luxury spa suites, and is split into a male and a female area. The women's section also contains the Glamour Studio beauty salon, while the men's section boasts a Gentlemen Barber by

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One of the two luxury treatment suites at the spa

Hommage, with treatments and services courtesy of the male grooming brand of the same name. Creating separate areas for men and women, each with thermal facilities that include a hammam, ice fountain, chromotherapy rain showers and sauna and steam room, was, Bharadwaj explains, a prerequisite for being able to cater for both genders in the UAE market.

“This applies to the therapists as well, there will be male therapists to treat the male guests and female therapists to treat the female guests,” he says. While the recruitment process was still ongoing at the time of writing, Bharadwaj expects staffing numbers to total around 25 once the spa team is complete. Ensuring that the spa stands out from and is different to its competitors is, Bharadwaj highlights, an essential aspect of the philosophy behind it and the staff is integral to achieving this aim.



ABOVE: A rendering of the female section of the spa

BELOW: A rendering showing the waiting area in the male part of the spa

“We have taken our time selecting the right team; the right people with the right attitude and the right experience, to ensure we deliver the best possible service and experience to our clients,” he comments. This has entailed recruiting staff from all over the world, to get the perfect fit for the spa.

“So far, we have three therapists from Thailand, who bring the Thai [spa] expertise and service culture with them. We also have two therapists from Bhutan, two therapists from Kerala in India, who have been trained not only in European but also in Ayurvedic treatments. Our in-house trainer is also from India, and we are shortly expecting a therapist from Japan,” Bharadwaj details. “We have a very good blend within our team, a nice combination of cultures, backgrounds and expertise and I think that’s something the guests will feel.”

Purchasing power

The spa not only has a multicultural mixture of therapists, a concerted effort has also been made to ensure that the spa concierges speak a wide range of the languages most relevant to its international clients. “Our concierges speak Russian, Arabic and Filipino, because sometimes we’ll receive guests who don’t speak English,” Bharadwaj says. While he



ABOVE: Dark wood and shades of brown and grey dominate in the male section of the spa
BELOW: A depiction of the Glamour Studio salon in the women's part of the spa.

anticipates that the local population in Ajman, one of the seven emirates that make up the UAE, and nearby Sharjah, another emirate, will be the spa's core clientele – the hotel also has an international customer base.

“Our main international markets are Russia, Germany and the UK, and on the weekends we also see a lot of guests from the wider UAE and from Saudi Arabia,” Bharadwaj says. Capturing the local clientele is nevertheless the spa's key focus, particularly in the early stages; an emphasis he says puts pressure on the team to offer the very highest standards. “Clients in the UAE are very demanding when it comes to products, standards and services,” he says. “They have strong purchasing power, so they don't mind spending money; but they want good service and good products that deliver results.”

What local clients are looking for is, Bharadwaj adds, “individual attention and a personalised service and that's what we strive to deliver. If the clients are not happy, they have enough money to spend and enough places to choose from [in the UAE] to take their business elsewhere.”

Results focus

The high expectations of the UAE clientele was also a factor in the product lines, each with accompanying treatments, that the spa has chosen to carry. Natural brand Amala and science-focused skincare brand QMS Medicosmetics were both, Bharadwaj comments, selected for the results they deliver. “Spa-goers here are familiar with all the



luxury brands but they don't want just fancy products, they want lines that will give them results, and that's where Amala and QMS come in.”

Among the treatments on the Goco Spa menu are firming, hydrating and antioxidant facials from Amala, the anti-ageing Pure Oxygen and Skin Cell Renewal facials from QMS and the latter's firming Body Definer treatment.

The spa's signature treatment is the Oriental Massage; using a combination of Eastern and Western massage techniques and incorporating a black diamond exfoliation.

Bharadwaj explains that the decision to build a Hommage barber, offering services such as shaves, haircuts, hammam rituals, eye treatments and exfoliation, into the spa was once again largely a case of considering the local and national clientele. “Men in the UAE pay a lot of attention to their hairstyle and their beards and generally spend quite a lot



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of time in the salon, so there’s a huge demand for and great potential in offering these services,” he says.

Style statement

Located on the fourth floor of the Ajman Saray, the spa is, unlike many other hotel spas, not tucked away in the basement, something Bharadwaj believes to be an important USP. “Virtually all spa areas apart from the reception have natural light, including the treatment rooms, the luxury spa suites and the relaxation area,” he says. “The treatment rooms face the Persian Gulf and when you look down, you see the beach and the pool.”

FAST FACTS

- o Spa size: 1,200sq m
- o Treatment rooms: 17, eight for women, seven for men, two luxury spa suites
- o Members of staff: Expected to be around 25, once recruitment is completed
- o Facilities: Separate male and female thermal areas, with hammam, sauna, steam room, ice fountain and chromotherapy rain showers in each. Glamour Studio beauty salon for women and Gentlemen Barber by Hommage for men
- o Signature treatment: The Oriental Massage, incorporating Eastern and Western massage techniques and a black diamond exfoliation



ABOVE: A rendering of the spa barber area, courtesy of male grooming brand Hommage

BELOW: There are well-equipped thermal areas in both the male and female sections of the spa

Indoors, there is a different design ethos in the male and female sections of the spa. “For the men’s area, we have used stronger and more masculine colours; dark brown, grey and darker wood colours,” Bharadwaj says, adding that the women’s side has a contrasting look and feel. “Everything is in a different theme in the women’s area; we’ve used light colours and interiors - such as off-white and magenta.”

Catering for a moneyed clientele that expects the best, the Goco Spa at Ajman Saray may have high expectations to live up to. However, offering high-end spa services and facilities in a 5-star hotel setting, bolstered by results-driven brands and created and run by an experienced spa management company, its odds of delivering on those expectations are equally high. 🌐

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