EVENT REPORT


SPACHINA

Just as in Western markets, middle-class consumers are more cautious in their spending but will still pay for high quality experiences

Lisa Starr, founder, Wynne Business

Chinese spas adapt

Lisa Starr reports on the Chinese spa market from SpaChina Wellness Summit

The annual SpaChina Wellness Summit gathered more than 350 spa and wellness professionals, investors and suppliers at W Changsha and The St Regis Changsha in September.

Changsha, which has 10.72 million inhabitants and is the capital of Hunan province, was the setting for the 19th edition of the event, which combines a three-day business conference with the annual SpaChina Wellness and Spa Awards. It's no secret that the Chinese economy's previously rapid pace of growth has slowed over the last few years, and the country faces similar economic and political uncertainties as the rest of the world. But with the size of the prize, China is far too big and fast-moving to ignore.


A variety of suppliers exhibited their products

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State of the industry

Chief editor of *SpaChina* Fifi Kao always opens the conference with an insightful state-of-the-industry report, and this year her observations included that the market is currently K-shaped; stronger brands and businesses with scale are growing, while small and mid-sized spas are under constant pressure, with 45 per cent of traditional models facing risk of closure even amid the growth.

Just as in Western markets, middle-class consumers are more cautious and selective in their spending but will still pay for experiences they perceive as high quality and distinctive, meaning that spas cannot cut staff, quality or standards or they risk obsolescence. Kao shared that Chinese spas are shifting from a relaxation-based model to take on healthcare



The event features a variety of panels discussions

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WELLNESS GROWTH IN CHINA

In terms of growth for the spa and wellness industry, here are some supporting developments:

- **China's first dedicated five-year plan for expanding consumption includes measures to boost spending on health, sports and tourism services, with a target of around 60 trillion yuan in total retail sales by 2030**
- **More than 60 per cent of Chinese Gen Z are paying close attention to their health, with 37.9 per cent tracking physical data such as steps or sleep**
- **Caixin Global reports that the number of people suffering from mental disorders has risen by nearly 50 per cent over three decades, reaching more than 190 million**

modalities, with a focus on longevity, recovery and preventive wellness, just as we are seeing in other markets. Future successful spa models in China will be more of an ecosystem connecting fitness, nutrition, outdoor activities and food and beverage with personal care services.

No country is adopting and using AI faster than China, but Kao also believes spas focusing on providing human authenticity, touch and sensory experiences that cannot be digitised, will become even more valuable. China can also leverage two specific traditions into competitive advantages; bathing culture offers an affordable and social activity that can feed spa utilisation, while Traditional Chinese Medicine provides a locally rooted framework for personalised health and preventive care.

Conference programme

During the Summit, presentations were made by 37 expert speakers on a wide variety of topics including longevity, energy healing, global business trends, wellness architecture and neuro-wellness. Panel discussions touched on technological innovations, science-based evidence and insights from young professionals.

Fifty-seven suppliers shared their latest offerings at stands or in private areas, which offered treatment options. Each evening featured a themed and sponsored cocktail party, leading up to the final evening's Awards Gala.

This year, 141 hotels, resorts, spas and businesses from 27 Chinese provinces, municipalities and special administrative regions and nine overseas countries entered the awards assessment process, with 61 winners taking home a coveted award.

The SpaChina Summit is an extremely organised and entertaining event that brings together the most important players in the world's second-largest national spa market. ●