

Golf & Spa

An IAGTO Review for the Golf Tourism Industry



The Feel Good Factor!

Can Spa & Wellness Facilities Increase Golf Travel Sales?

In response to being asked about the value of their spa product in terms of attracting more golf travellers, the Award winning Banyan The Resort, Hua Hin said quite simply ‘the more we can offer, the better the deal!’. In a nutshell, this is where spa and wellness sits in the golf tourism industry, as an added incentive and attraction for visiting golfers but not usually as a primary motivational factor for destination choice.

The number of specialist spa and wellness tour operators is relatively small in comparison to golf tour operators, which is an indication of the relative importance of spa-led holidays in general, particularly outside of weekend domestic or short break trips. One hotel with very good spa facilities in Spain remarked that their spa facilities were important to only three out of 100 guests in terms of hotel choice. The number of people for whom both golf and spa are equally important driving factors in the choice of their destination or resort is therefore even less.

“Our Golfer’s Tonic package includes a full body exfoliation, deep-tissue massage and cleansing facial, but they usually just book a massage!”
 (Arabella Hotel & Spa)

However, as a facility that golfers and their travelling partners can enjoy while on a golf vacation, spas can play a very important role. Rather than being a determining factor in destination choice, they are most likely to affect choice of hotel or golf resort.

Differentiating Spa & Wellness

The words spa and wellness tend to be interchangeable and their use varies from country to country. In this review we have used the following definitions:

Spa referring to the wide range of facilities that can be enjoyed by visitors looking for a relaxing, stress-relieving, invigorating or feel-good experience. Each individual treatment or experience being relatively short in duration, including, for example:

- Wet Rooms (sauna, steam rooms, Jacuzzis, whirlpools, vitality pools)
- Body Massage, Golf Massage, Foot Massage, Sports Massage, Deep-Tissue Massage, Swedish Massage, Thai & Bali Massage
- Shiatsu, Reflexology
- Hammam, Turkish Bath
- Gym

Wellness referring more to health-orientated treatment designed to improve or alleviate medical or physiological conditions.

So for people seeking wellness rather than spa treatments, wellness itself becomes a primary purpose of travel. For these people, golf is more likely to be a healthy activity that can be enjoyed while staying at the resort rather than itself being the primary motivational factor. So with golf & wellness, **the golf element is likely to be secondary** while, with golf & spa, **the golf is much more likely to be the primary purpose of travel**.

For the remainder of this review we focus on the combination of golf & spa, rather than wellness, to consider the role that spas can play in attracting more golfers to a destination, resort or hotel.



Cover Photos

- Main:
The Spa at Aghadoe Heights Hotel & Spa
- Bottom left:
The Pool at Fairmont St Andrews
- Bottom middle:
Spa & Thalasso at Gloria Hotels & Resorts
- Bottom right:
Spa Room Suite at Saujana Resort

Spa Double Villa at Saujana Resort

Maximising the Value of the Spa Experience for the Golfer

If spas are generally considered to be a secondary product and not a primary driver of incremental golf tourism sales, then the objective of every hotel and golf course with spa facilities should be to at least ensure that spa facilities dovetail with the specific needs and behaviour of the golf traveller.

“Confidence in the quality of the spa is essential; a room with a Jacuzzi and some coconut soap does not a spa make!”

On a recent IAGTO fam trip to Gran Canaria combining five rounds of golf and one afternoon’s optional spa at the Lopesan Costa Meloneras Resort, Spa and Casino, it was noticeable just how many of these specialist golf tour operators were gushing about the hotel’s spa facilities, even though spa facilities were nowhere near the top of the operators’ agenda prior to the visit. Therefore, the presentation of spa facilities to golfers can have a major impact on their overall experience and their assessment of the venue.

The three most important tips to hotels with spas wishing to attract golfers are:

- 1) Allow **free access** to Wet Rooms & the Gym – while not essential, these are the spa facilities most frequently used by golfers and therefore should be made as accessible as possible without incurring additional costs.
- 2) Ensure that the Gym is **open early enough** for golfers to be able to make use of it before heading out to play golf.
- 3) Ensure that both Wet Rooms & Massage treatments are open and available to guests **after they have played golf** and returned to the hotel, bearing in mind that this may be early or mid evening. A massage service that only operates from 10am-5pm is often of no use to the golfer.

With golf being a sometimes tiring and time-consuming holiday activity, particularly if either hot and humid or cold, windy and wet, golf travellers have less time on their hands to make use of a hotel’s spa facilities and, therefore, we recommend that hotels make their spas more relevant to golfers and actively encourage them to make use of the facilities. Most golfers will have a free day or free afternoon during their programme, so be sure to know the golfer’s itinerary and invite them to use the spa when it makes best sense for them to do so. The following suggestions might help:

- A. Make all spa facilities (not necessarily treatments) free to golfers
- B. Make golfers aware that the spa is open at the best time of day for them
- C. Offer treatments specifically designed for golfers, such as a 15-minute post-golf neck and shoulder massage or a 30-minute post-golf foot massage
- D. Incorporate golf themes into the treatments themselves or into their names
- E. Offer golfers discounts on treatments, particularly those most popular with golf visitors
- F. Make sure that the spa is conveniently located if you are offering post-golf treatments
- G. Golf-related treatments should usually take less than 60 minutes

“Our spa is located next to the golf course, it is open every day, and we offer special rates for golfers”
(Parador el Saler Golf Resort)

Cengkareng Golf Club in Jakarta offers all golfers, members and guests, a complimentary 15-minute massage at the end of their round in a room built for purpose next to the changing room. The electronic locker key gives the golfer one-time-access only to the massage room, therefore avoiding the need to have a reception.

Half Moon, A RockResort in Jamaica has a spa treatment designed specifically for golfers that utilises heated golf balls, as does Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North with its 50 or 80-minute golfer’s massage.

Get Creative!

Spa Treatments with a Golf Theme

Golfers’ Massage
After-Golf Therapy
Golfers’ Tonic
Total Golf Package
Quiro Massage with golf balls
Head & Shoulders Massage on course
Sauna with view of golf course!

Value for money throughout the golf tourism industry is key, and this always combines two elements: Quality and Price. So do not overlook this with the spa service, noting particularly:

- 1) High-quality treatment and experience
- 2) At least some free access
- 3) Reasonable prices

Some golfers will take offence if the treatments are more expensive than the day’s green fee. A daily combination of golf & spa can become very expensive, so if this is an objective it needs to be priced accordingly.

Spa Experiences for Golfers from IAGTO Golf Resorts

Half Moon A RockResort in Jamaica has offered golfers a special massage at the golf club before and after playing golf just by setting up massage chairs at the 19th hole. The Spa Director and Golf Director worked together to create golf-specific programmes which involve assessment, golfers' massage, yoga and pilates.

Mauna Kea Resort Hawaii offers a Lomi Lomi massage, which stretches their shoulder muscles and helps them relax.

On a more in-depth level, **The Gleneagles Hotel** developed their Fit for Golf programme to help golfers elevate their game with an integrated approach to physical and mental wellbeing. Two, four and seven-day programmes allow golfers to add musculoskeletal strength, reduce stiffness and pain and learn how to fuel their body for 18 dynamic holes of golf.

The spa at **Fota Island Resort** offers a specific sports massage aimed at either preparing the muscles and joints for athletic activity or helping golfers recover from stress and strain associated with playing the game. Their Walking River utilises different temperatures to reduce muscle fatigue associated with golfing, jet lag and other physical activity.

“Regular spas can prolong your playing days and prolong your enjoyment of the game!”

Targeting Golf Tour Operators

Of IAGTO's 455 golf tour operators in 58 countries, only a few will pro-actively sell golf and spa as a combination. So the first action to take is to **seek these operators out!**

The three common denominators of most non-domestic holidays are: a) flight, b) hotel and c) car hire or transfers. Golf holidays not only have the extra element of the green fee, but on average five rounds, frequently at different courses. Therefore, golf holidays have an added cost already built into them. This is perhaps one of the reasons why **few golfers book spa or wellness treatments in advance**. The vagaries of the weather also often lead to golfers preferring to book spa activities or treatments on site. This needs to be taken into account when talking to golf tour operators, with perhaps incentives offered for pre-bookings.

“Nothing annoys a client more than spending \$300 on a room and then being charged \$10 for access to the sauna!”

Many golf travellers are accompanied by non-playing partners or family members. **The spa is a definite attraction for the non-golfer but is still rarely booked in advance.**

Golf tour operators earn a 10% commission from pre-booked treatments at Slieve Donard Resort & Spa.

The Impact of Destination, Location and Climate on the Golfer's use of Spas

Here are some 'truisms' that particularly apply to golf holiday makers and their use of spa facilities:

- 1) The relevance and importance of the spa to a golfer and non-golfing partner increases the more isolated the golf resort or golf destination is.
- 2) For golf resorts with their own golf course, a spa voucher can be a much-appreciated concession if a round of golf is cancelled due to bad weather, particularly in winter destinations where the weather is not consistently hot and dry.
- 3) Of course, a sauna will appeal to golfers travelling to destinations with relatively colder climates rather than to those who have spent five hours in 30 degrees Celsius heat and 90% humidity!
- 4) Spas are particularly common in hotels located in exotic beach destinations such as Mauritius, Hawaii and the Caribbean islands, as well as Belek in Turkey and the Red Sea in Egypt, mainly because these are predominantly couples' markets. Thalassotherapy also tends to be more common in these destinations.



Cultural Variations & Trends

The clients of golf tour operators have very different individual preferences and requirements when it comes to spa and, particularly, wellness. Without overly generalising, the use of spa facilities during a golf vacation certainly seems to vary depending on the nationality and chosen destination.

Below are just a few observations.

Central & Eastern Europeans (for example) tend to be more familiar with spa services and are keen to enjoy them while abroad. Indeed, some golf tour operators in these countries have said that if the hotels do not offer spa treatments, their clients will not book them.

Conversely, Thai & Japanese, who are very familiar with spas, do not tend to seek them out while travelling long haul but will choose to have spa or wellness treatments travelling domestically.

Americans travelling to Japan to play golf may indulge in spas because it is part of the overall cultural experience, something they may not perhaps do on a golf holiday to Scotland

Horses for Courses

As everyone in the golf tourism industry knows, there are different types of golf traveller and the combination of golf and spa is most prevalent amongst certain groupings:

- 1) Small groups of couples travelling together with some non-playing partners are ideally suited to golf & spa.
- 2) Family vacations with golf are usually not entirely golf-focused and are therefore open to spa activities.
- 3) Couples will often choose destinations with cultural or 'beach' appeal and, as mentioned previously, spa facilities abound in hotels catering for this market.
- 4) Groups can be tricky, even groups of ladies, because time is more regimented (golf takes longer and dinners are organised). The key for the host hotel is to get into the details of the programme and recommend specific spa treatments at the most relevant time.
- 5) For avid golfers playing 36 holes of golf in a day, the spa can be essential!
- 6) Professional sports trips always incorporate recovery and other treatments.

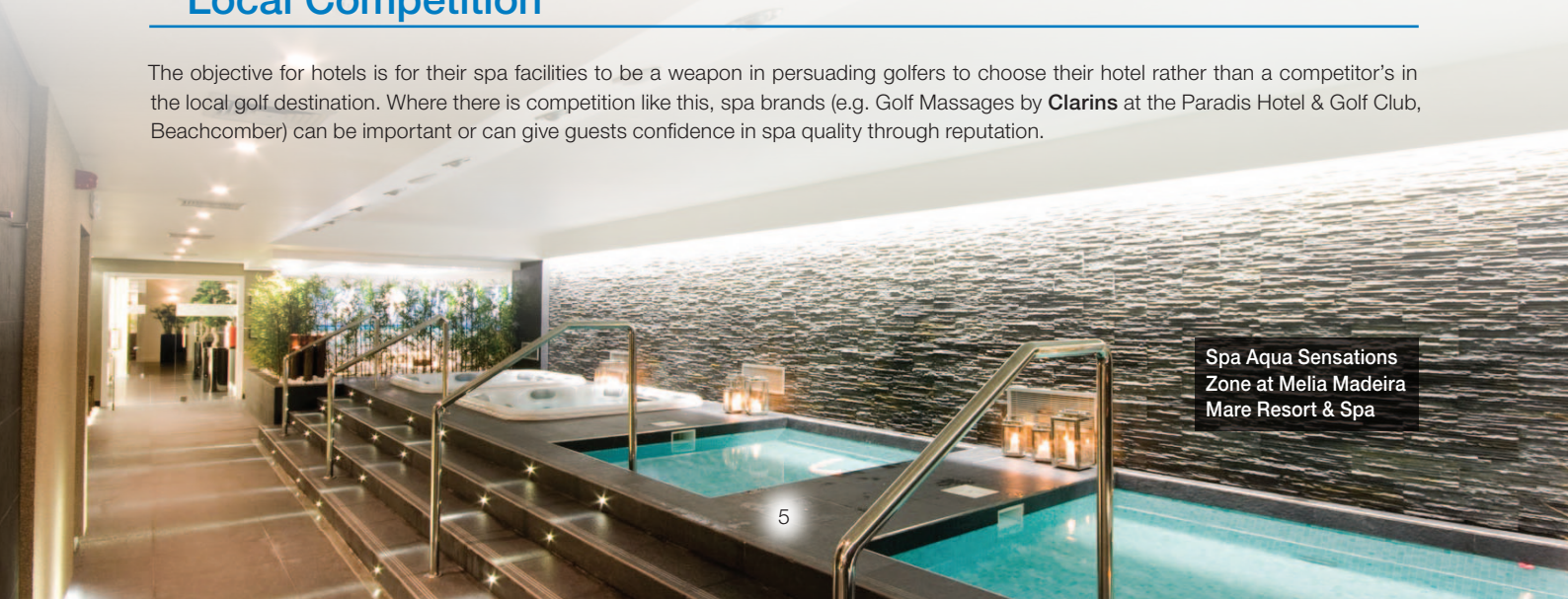
“Our tailored Golfing Recovery Massage that concentrates on the core areas out-sells everything else as far as golfers are concerned.”

(Slieve Donard Resort & Spa)

This from Slieve Donard Resort & Spa: 'Only 5% of people travel with non-playing partners and most of these like to shop, with 37% taking a spa treatment.'

Local Competition

The objective for hotels is for their spa facilities to be a weapon in persuading golfers to choose their hotel rather than a competitor's in the local golf destination. Where there is competition like this, spa brands (e.g. Golf Massages by **Clarins** at the Paradis Hotel & Golf Club, Beachcomber) can be important or can give guests confidence in spa quality through reputation.



Spa Aqua Sensations Zone at Melia Madeira Mare Resort & Spa

1900

MEMBERS IN 90 COUNTRIES



450

BUYERS IN 58 COUNTRIES

Creating Opportunities • Delivering Information • Raising Awareness • Raising Standards

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