



Lakeside WELLNESS

Sustainability, wellness innovation and investment in staff are key to the concept and success of Italy's **Lefay Resort & Spa**

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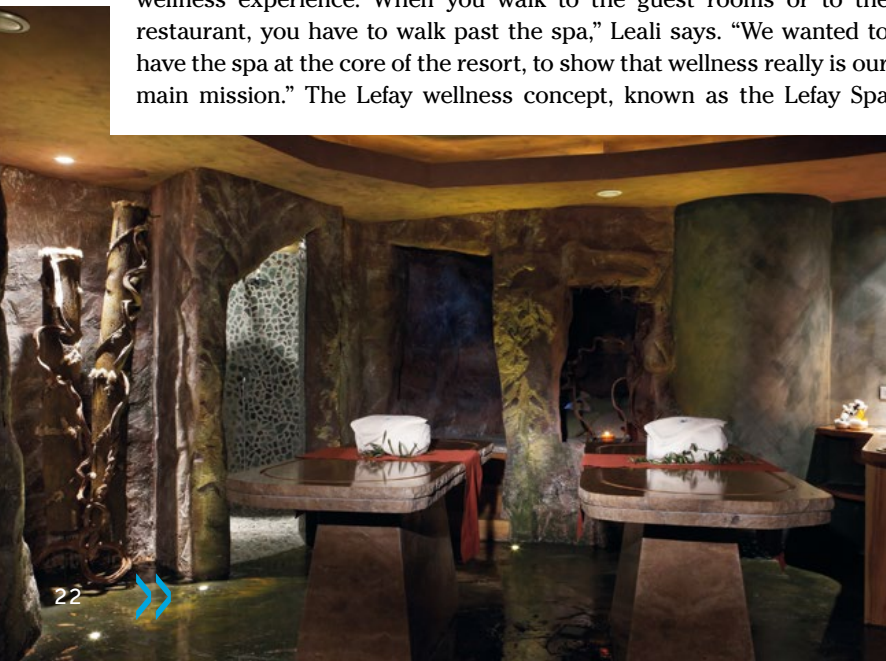
“**T**he Lefay concept is about wellness that is not limited to the spa; we wanted to provide our guests with a wellness experience throughout their stay,” explains Alcide Leali, managing director of Italy’s award-winning Lefay Resort & Spa Lago di Garda. The family-owned resort (the owners are Leali’s parents), which opened in 2008 and whose awards include winning Worldwide Health & Wellness Destination at the 2016 World Spa & Wellness Awards, was designed to reflect this wellbeing focus.

“At Lefay, the whole resort was designed to provide our guests with a wellness experience. When you walk to the guest rooms or to the restaurant, you have to walk past the spa,” Leali says. “We wanted to have the spa at the core of the resort, to show that wellness really is our main mission.” The Lefay wellness concept, known as the Lefay Spa

Method, combines ancient Chinese medicine with a results-focused western approach; producing a philosophy that balances the scientific with the holistic. “Our method is based on two pillars,” Leali says. “The classical Chinese medicine is essentially preventative medicine, so it’s very different from western medicine, which is very curative.”

He adds: “Most of our treatments and programmes are Lefay signature ones with specific protocols that we have designed”. Elements that draw on Chinese medicine include a five-night programme focusing on correct posture, a detoxifying and a yin and yang-based rebalancing massage, a massage taking an energy-based approach to tackling insomnia, the Aculifting facial, which uses acupuncture for anti-ageing effect, and an anti-cellulite treatment that incorporates acupuncture and a draining massage.

Offerings under the “western medicine” umbrella include tests to assess a person’s food intolerances, cardiovascular health, stress hormone levels, cellular ageing process and melatonin levels (which affect your ability to sleep). Lefay also has doctors on staff, with the spa menu including a



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medical examination, and collaborates with a medical lab, to which any blood samples are sent for analysis.

Location, location, location

Lefay is positioned as a destination spa and Leali says that while not all guests choose the resort because of the spa and the wellness programmes, the majority do. “We are perceived in the market as a wellness retreat and more than 70% of our guests come for the spa,” he comments. The Lefay Spa Method, which includes a Weight Management programme, a Beauty of Body and Mind programme to relax and rebalance the body and address the signs of ageing on the skin, personalised health programmes tailored to each guest and a Detox programme introduced earlier this year, is of course essential in attracting guests to the property.

However, Leali believes the resort's position by Lake Garda in northern Italy has also played a part in its success. “The location of the property is quite secluded, it's positioned on a hill

with stunning views of the lake,” he says. “If you want to provide a wellness experience the location is very important because you need to be in harmony with nature. I think our location is one of the key success factors for our project because it's perfect for wellness.”

Lefay's location not only matters because it offers serenity, it's also geographically strategic in other ways. “Lake Garda is in northern Italy, which is the wealthiest part of Italy, and it's close to Switzerland, Austria and southern Germany, so we're in the heart of one of the wealthiest regions in Europe,” Leali says. “It's also good because people can come to the property by car within three-four hours [from many locations]. If you look at Europe, most of the spa destinations are located around this region and that's not by chance.”

The Lefay clientele is, he says, largely international, with about “70% international and 30% Italian guests,” and certain global markets provide a larger client pool than others. “A very important market share comes from German-speaking markets; from Switzerland, Germany and Austria, the UK is a very important and growing market, Russia is also important, and in the last two or three years we have seen an increase in guests from the US and the Middle East.”

Healthy competition

The reasons people come to Lefay has, Leali says, changed since the property opened in 2008. While the spa and wellness programmes have always been important, there has been a shift in what guests are looking for these elements to deliver. “When it comes to medical programmes, for example, most people in the



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beginning came for weight loss and weight management," explains Leali. "But we have now developed more of other types of programmes, like our detox and sleep programmes, and we have seen an increased interest in these."

"It's not just about weight loss now," Leali says. "Modern life means we're facing more and more problems, like stress and back problems, and that's what we're now focusing on. At first we didn't think the posture programme would be very successful, because it's so specific, but it turned out to be very popular because so many people have problems with their shoulders or their backs due to bad posture."

The global development that has seen spa-goers and wellness clients become better informed and more demanding is something that has also affected Lefay. "The people who come here for wellness experiences have become more and more knowledgeable about what a spa is and what they should expect from a spa or wellness programme," says Leali. "Especially when it comes to our international clients who also go to places like Como Shambhala, Chiva-Som and Ananda in the Himalayas and really know what to expect from a wellness or medical programme in a spa destination."

He admits that this puts additional pressure on the resort to be at the top of their game and deliver the best possible treatments and programmes, commenting that "you really need to have a strong concept and be on top of the services you provide". This is, however, something Leali welcomes. "It's a big challenge, but it gives us motivation. I think one of the reasons we have improved so much in the past few years is that we're competing on a worldwide scale, whereas in the beginning we were [just] competing with Italian and maybe Austrian and German spas."

Training time

One area the resort is conscious of excelling in is staff training, with all spa therapists receiving thorough training that is staggered across different levels. "Human resources is maybe the most crucial element in a spa and staff training is one of the dimensions we've really worked on in the past few years," Leali explains. "It never happens that we hire a therapist and directly let them perform treatments, even if they have experience. We carry out an extensive training programme because of what we do at Lefay, because of the Lefay Spa Method and the Lefay signature treatments – we need to

teach them our philosophy and our protocols before they can treat guests."

"Every treatment requires a certain amount of training and when therapists reach the threshold amount of hours for a specific treatment, they carry it out on other staff members, which gives us full control over the treatments we give to guests," Leali says. "Junior therapists can perform certain kinds of treatments, then when they become senior therapists they can perform more treatments, and so on. It's a very structured approach." While he admits that this investment in training is both "time-consuming and expensive", he adds that making it has paid off.

"We have a very low turnover of staff in the spa, just 4%, and that's because people are motivated to stay; they get training and they get the chance to grow professionally. Some of our therapists were very young when they started and are now senior therapists or training managers, so they have been with us for many years." The fact that the team members tend to remain with the spa for some time has, he adds, many advantages. "If you have a low staff turnover, you can concentrate your efforts on training and on developing the staff's careers, and you also have more time to invest in the quality of protocols and products," he says.

The spa's commitment to training and to allowing its staff to grow professionally is a reflection of the belief that investing in your people is not an area you can afford to skimp on. "Your staff are what makes you unique, so it's one of the most important aspects in a spa," Leali says.

In-house inventions

The resort has its own Lefay Spa product range and Leali explains that as they have their "own method, treatments and programmes, it was a natural



choice to also develop our own [skincare] line". A key element of the product range is the use of local produce, grounding it in the region and the landscape.

"We use some ingredients from the territory in the products; all our massage oils are made with extra virgin olive oil from farms in the region," he says. In addition to its own product line, Lefay also works with marine skincare brand Thalgo, a decision Leali says was largely based on two factors. "We wanted to complement our offer with an international brand, and we also liked Thalgo's thalassotherapy concept, which is why we chose the brand as a partner for the spa."

Sustainability and a focus on the environment is part of the Lefay philosophy, not just within the spa but throughout the resort. All of the resort's electricity is derived from renewable energy sources (with 60% generated on site), as is 85% of its heating and 100% of its air conditioning. The resort also gathers and reuses rainwater and has an energy-saving laundry system. Earlier this year the Lefay spa was awarded Ecocert's Being certification for organic and ecological spas – the first spa in Italy to receive one. Leali says organic accreditation is something they're looking to also seek for other areas. "We are planning to get an organic certification for the skincare line, that's a target for the future."

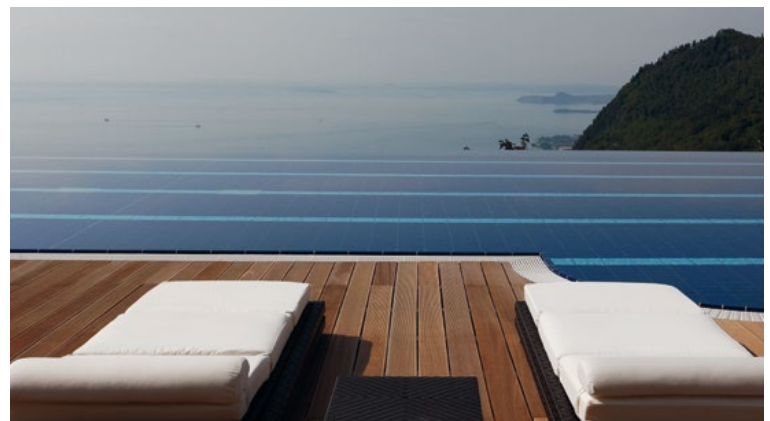
Awards honours

The Lefay spa is a sizeable 3,800sq m – extended from 3,000sq m at the beginning of 2015 – but still has the potential for further expansion, something Leali says is on the cards. "There is some space available within the spa, which we are planning to develop in the future. We have

some ideas for what we want to do with it, but nothing is decided yet." Judging by the spa's record to date, there is also likely to be more awards ahead, and Leali says this is something that matters very much to Lefay.

"Receiving awards is important and we really celebrate and promote these accomplishments. It's someone from outside of the company saying that what you're doing makes sense and it really motivates the staff," he says. "Staff are usually in the resort every day, fully involved with operations, and sometimes they need a bit of extra motivation. Getting awards [helps them] understand what possibilities there are." For the ambitious and committed Lefay spa, those possibilities look set to be many. 🌐

www.lefayresorts.com



FAST FACTS

- Opened: 2008
- Spa size: 3,800sq m
- Treatment rooms: 21 rooms and two private spa suites
- Facilities: indoor/outdoor saltwater pool, 25m swimming pool, saltwater lake, whirlpool, aroma, caligo, olive tree-panelled, Finish and women's only saunas, hammam, three relaxation rooms – including the Sunset Relaxation Room – two silent rooms, a grotto with heated, water-filled relaxation beds, steam room, ice fountain, fitness centre offering personal training sessions and activities including meditation, pool-based workout sessions and guided walks
- Brands: Lefay Spa, Thalgo, Intraceuticals, Orly, La Biosthetique
- Staff: 25