

ALPINE ENERGY

Italian destination spa Lefay has just opened a second location in the Dolomites. Jane Kitchen finds out how wellness underpins everything for this innovative group

The spa is at the heart – both literally and figuratively – of everything at Lefay. Owned by the Leali family, Lefay has positioned itself as an innovative wellness-focused hotel group, with a spa philosophy that combines classical Chinese medicine with modern western techniques, a focus on sustainable design, and enviable locations that take advantage of their natural settings. The Italian wellbeing hospitality group has just opened a second location in the Dolomites mountain range, north Italy, to complement its much-respected Lake Garda location, and plans are underway for a third resort in Tuscany. The Lealis also hope to expand beyond Italy, and are exploring opening branded locations in central Europe – in particular Austria and Switzerland – with a goal to have five properties open within the next 10 years, all with spa as a central focus.



“At Lefay properties, wellness embraces the entire holiday experience and can be found everywhere: wide spaces, architectural integration, the natural material used, the Vital Mediterranean cuisine, and above all, the treatments by Lefay Spa,” says Alcide Leali, managing director of Lefay Resorts. “We don’t build hotels – we build spa hotels. Spa is always at the core of our properties.”

Destination spa

The entire Dolomiti resort is positioned around the centrally located spa, with suites spread out in two side wings. But it’s not just the location that showcases the spa’s importance in the Lefay model; at 5,000sq m (54,000sq ft), it’s a full 30 per cent bigger than the already impressive 3,800sq m (41,000sq ft) spa at Lake Garda, and is one of the largest in the Alpine region. “Lefay Dolomiti is an upgrade in terms of infrastructure, with bigger rooms

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DESTINATION SPA

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► and a bigger spa,” says Leali. “We wanted to enter the market with a property that’s not just a leader today, but that will still be a leader in the next 10-20 years.”

The focus on spa seems to be paying off: at both the Lake Garda property and the Dolomiti location, 30 per cent of resort revenue is generated by the spa, with around 50 per cent of guests taking a treatment. This also means that the Dolomiti hotel – located in Madonna di Campiglio, one of the top skiing destinations in Italy – can attract guests year-round. “A spa destination in itself is attractive for guests, regardless of the location or the season – people need to go there to stay healthy and recover,” says Leali. “This need is essential and not deferrable.”

Treatments and programming at the new Lefay Dolomiti spa – which is spread over four levels – are based around the Lefay Spa Method, a wellness philosophy born from studies carried out by a team of medical experts in various holistic disciplines. Signature energy treatments aim to rebalance and rejuvenate both the body and mind by stimulating classical Chinese meridians to activate the energy systems. In the Dolomites, this philosophy has also been translated to a vast, 1,700sq m (18,300sq ft) thermal area known as the Energy Therapeutic World.



The spa generates up to 30 per cent of resort revenue

Energy zones

It’s the Energy Therapeutic World that’s the star of Lefay Dolomiti, with five zones based on the Chinese qi energy concept which moves through five phases between the poles of yin and yang.

“Everything that exists is connected to these five phases, that can be connected to the seasons, colours, directions, and parts of the human body,” explains Leali. Each of the five areas – The Green Dragon, The Red Phoenix, The White Tiger, The Black Tortoise and the Centre – is devoted to a particular season and linked to an organ in the body and feature different colours, scents and levels of temperature and humidity . “Being inside these zones, in a world of analogies and symbolism, will help guests to understand the type of energy they need to find balance again,” says Leali. “They represent the relationship between our body and the elements, the seasons, and the unique paths of our existence.”

Guests are given recommended circuits that include prescribed time in specific saunas (from a choice of nine) and relaxation areas, combined with massages, facials, breathing or meditation activities. The spa Centre includes a hydrotherapy pool with a domed skylight, and relaxation areas with commanding views of the mountains. Light is important in this area, which



The vast thermal area is the star of the spa. It’s built around five energy zones, including the Black Tortoise (right) to tackle stress



The spa sits at the centre of the resort and covers 5,000sq m, making it 30 per cent bigger than the original one in Lake Garda

LEFAY DOLOMITI SPA SUPPLIERS

Treatments & products: in-house range, Hydrafacial, Intraceuticals and Zo Skin Health

Heat experiences and pools: Hofer Group

Hydrobaths: Unbescheiden

Beds: Lemi

Linen: Beltrami

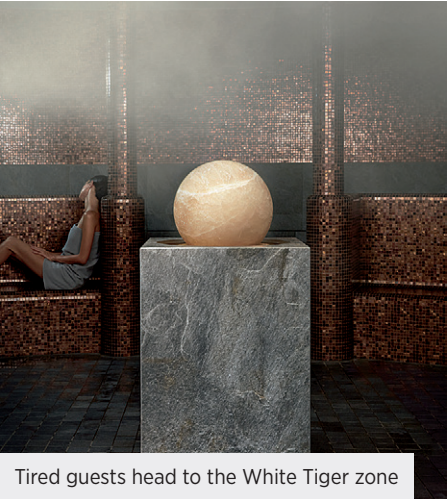
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connects all of the zones, and guests are encouraged to transition here for a few minutes between the different saunas .

The Black Tortoise

I’m told my own energetic levels will naturally draw me to one of the four zones – the Green Dragon is suggested for impulsive and nervous people, while the White Tiger is for people experiencing weakness, tiredness or melancholy – and each zone even has its own blend of herbal teas to help realign your energy.

For me, it was the Black Tortoise path – suggested for people experiencing stress – that drew me in, which meant retreating into a dim, cave-like area created with dark stone and black tile. There, surrounded by the scent of juniper and cypress, I rested in the Salt Grotto, and floated blissfully in the hypersaline waters of the Salt Water Lake – one of three private floatation pools designed for up to two people. The spa brochure tells me this zone represents the stage of profound gathering, of winter, and the peak of yin. If this energy is imbalanced, light sleep and loss of creative abilities can ensue. A full Black Tortoise sequence consists of the Salt Grotto and Salt Water Lake, relaxation on a water lounger, plus a



Tired guests head to the White Tiger zone

50-minute Massage of the Black Tortoise using chromotherapy and vapourised essential oils, a 50-minute facial energy massage, a 40-minute qi gong session, and dedicated phytotherapy session, and is offered for €300 (US\$332, £255).

“The challenges people face in their daily lives are driving them to explore new wellness-related products and services as they realise a need to take care of themselves,” says Leali. “As well as pollution, bad dietary habits and less time to exercise, today’s consumers experience mounting pressures, tough schedules, lack of true leisure time, and constant availability through digital devices. As a response, a step back is needed: guests reassess how they live their lives, and look for other types of fulfilment.”

Mountain spa

In addition to the Energy Therapeutic World, the spa features a treatment and rituals floor for treatments with more than 20 rooms, as well as a level dedicated to fitness, with a 24-hour Technogym-equipped centre that overlooks the garden and includes studios for breathing, meditation and physical-energetic rebalancing classes. The indoor

DESTINATION SPA

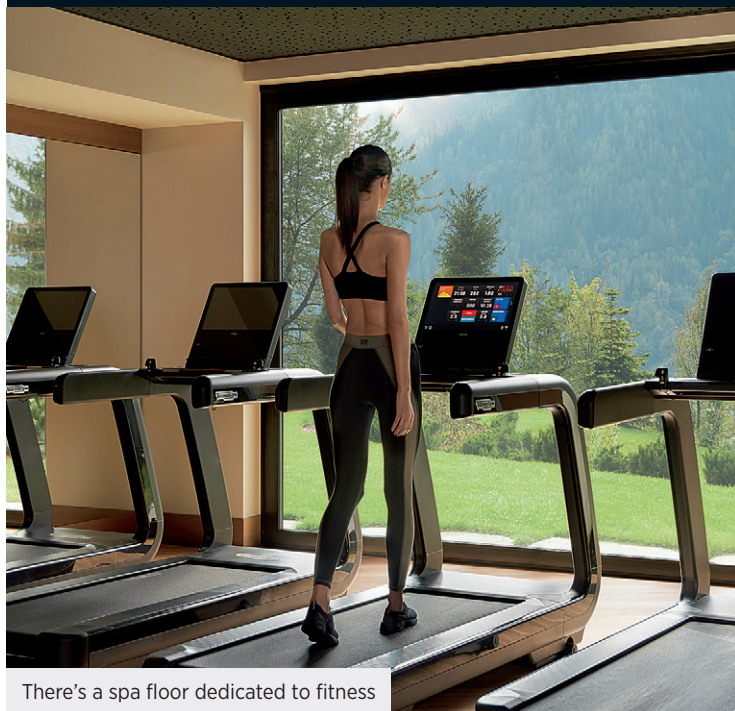
sports pool is covered in tonalite, a local granite-like stone, and has been inspired by the mountain streams, while the indoor-outdoor pool includes hydrotherapy circuits, and boasts stunning views across the mountains and valleys. Indeed, floor-to-ceiling glass takes advantage of the mountain views throughout the resort, from the relaxation area to the restaurants and even the Red Dragon sauna.

Spa treatments aim to reactivate energy channels and to rebalance the energy of the body and mind, and combine traditional massage techniques with the stimulation of meridian points. A new Scents of the Forest category uses natural local ingredients like horse chestnut and arnica oils enriched with mountain pine and juniper, mineral alpine salt and traditional butter from the Alps. Other treatments use mud from the nearby Val di Genova which is enriched with magnesium or malachite.

In addition, non-invasive aesthetic treatments are on offer, including Hydrafacial MD and oxygen therapy treatments from Intraceuticals and Zo Skin Health Restoration by Dr Zein Obagi, aimed at treating skin discolouration, acne and dehydration. Specialist medical consultations and treatments in physiotherapy and osteopathy are also available.

Designing wellness

The 88-bedroom resort has been designed by architect Hugo Demetz, who worked on the original Lefay Resort. Demetz used local wood and stone to help the hotel blend into the landscape, and clad the exteriors in fir and larch wood. Italian architect Alberto Apostoli, whose clients include operators



There's a spa floor dedicated to fitness



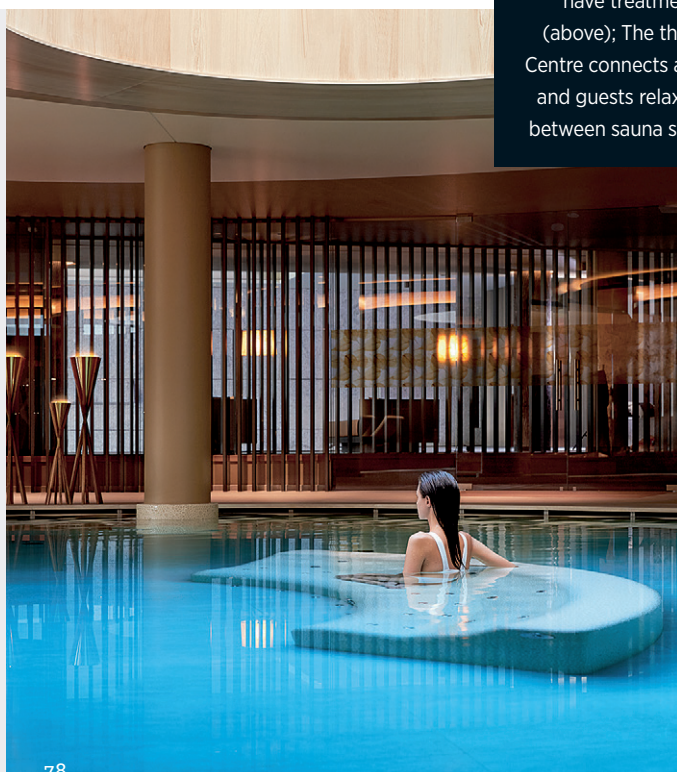
Fifty per cent of guests have treatments (above); The thermal Centre connects all areas and guests relax there between sauna sessions

Innovation, nature and a unique wellness method are the principles of the Lefay wellness philosophy

such as Four Seasons and Relais & Chateaux, designed the interiors, which feature natural materials such as Italian oak for the parquet flooring and chestnut for the furnishings, as well as local stone, Italian leather, wool and cotton linens. Lefay has positioned itself as a sustainable brand, and the new resort is certified by ClimaHotel and uses renewable energy sources to produce thermal and electric energy.

The Dolomiti property is also home to the first Lefay-branded wellness residences which have access to all of the resort's services, including the spa. There are 22 in total and they range in price from €1m (US\$1.1m, £851,300) to over €3m (US\$3.3m, £2.6m). "This means the Lefay experience is not limited to a wellness stay, but expands into a new mode of living in a place where wellness is everywhere," says Leali. Plans are also underway to add residences to the Lake Garda location, and residences will also be on offer at the upcoming resort in Tuscany.

"Innovation, nature and a unique wellness method are the principles of the Lefay wellness philosophy, blending together east and west to recover inner harmony," says Leali. "We believe that exclusivity means doing what no one else has yet thought of, investing in the present and in the future, creating something for a select few that benefits everyone." ●



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