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# The Evolution of Spa

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## Introduction

Much has already been written about the evolution of spa beginning with ancient civilisations through to the Victorian era and the fashion for taking the waters. This simple time series view of evolution tends to miss the key factors that were involved in the development of those spas, and most importantly those products, over time and space. The current industry product portfolio in broad terms includes tourism, health, sustainability and wellness, with organic change often adapting from historic products into consumer driven demand for new products that are often global. This has led to a curious mix of brands and sub brands that can all trace their roots to other traditional products that were built upon history and culture. Current demands are, in essence, dichotomous as they are both unique and global.

This chapter explains how the spa product has evolved from the historic definitions of spa and its products to a globalised industry built upon that history and culture. We explore the evolution of spa from the natural thermal spring waters discovered by the Romans to the establishment of treatments for the wealthy in beautiful spa resorts. We trace the development of the hospital system, from the medicinal properties of the waters and access to medical treatments, and how this has led to the globalisation of the health care system and a billion dollar global health tourism industry. We see how the fashionable leisure activity of the Victorians to 'take the waters' has grown into a wellness tourism industry worth billions, and finally we discover well known organisations that have their origins in spa.

## From natural thermal springs to global spa treatments

The benefits of therapies and treatments have been packaged and sold by a spa industry that has grown rapidly in recent years. These therapies and treatments have their origins in the nineteenth century and use thermal waters in hydrotherapy treatments; espouse the benefits of fresh air and exercise in beautiful locations based on the philosophy of the sanatorium movement; use naturopathy and alternative medicine such as homeopathy, herbalism, and acupuncture; and have developed manipulative therapies from around the world into massage therapies such as Tui na massage, Swedish massage and Indian head massage.

### ■ Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy is the use of water in the treatment of different conditions such as arthritis and rheumatic complaints. The treatment often takes place in spa water as it is believed by many that the mineral content of spa water has special health-giving properties.

The first hydrotherapy spa was established in Grafenburg in Germany (formally in Czechoslovakia) in 1829 by Vincent Priessnitz. The spa offered a range of treatments including diet, exercise, bathing, fresh air and health. The 'Priessnitz cure' included various cold water treatments that are still in use today.

Fr. Sebastian Kneipp continued Priessnitz's work and popularised it in 1880. The 'Kneipp cure' is a form of hydrotherapy involving the application of water through various methods, temperatures and pressures. Kneipp advocated a comprehensive natural healing treatment that covers human physical, mental and spiritual wholeness and is used today in a variety of ways in many spas to help relax tired muscles and relieve stress. (Crebbin-Bailey *et al.*, 2005; van Tubergen and van der Linden, 2002)

### ■ Sanatorium movement

The first sanatorium, dedicated to the treatment of tuberculosis, was established by Hermann Brehmer in 1854 in Görbersdorf, Silesia (now Poland). Sanatoriums provided rest, a healthy diet, gentle exercise and fresh air which, although they did not cure tuberculosis, provided some relief and helped to strengthen immune systems. In Switzerland, many sanatoriums provided entertainment for patients, and are an early example of spa resorts. They were located in mountain villages such as Davos where the air was deemed to be particularly pure.

### ■ Naturopathy

Naturopathy is a form of alternative medicine using a variety of 'natural' modalities, including homeopathy, herbalism, and acupuncture, as well as diet and

lifestyle counselling, and was first used by Dr John Scheel in 1895. Johann Schroth, was the first modern naturopath to use clinical nutrition, or the use of diet as a therapy. According to the General Council and Register of Naturopaths (n.d.) his original treatment, the *Schrothkur*, or dry diet, is still used in central Europe. Naturopaths continue to prescribe nutrition, food rotation, wholefood diets, dietary support or restrictions as part of naturopathic treatment.

## ■ Manipulative therapies

Physiology was a rapidly growing science championed by a Swedish physiologist Peter Henry Ling who was an advocate of the beneficial therapeutic effects of physical exercise. He is credited with starting the Swedish Gymnastic Movement System. The Swedish massage system, a popular therapy, is often accredited to Ling but it was developed by Johan Mezger, who adopted the French terms of *effleurage*, *petrissage*, *tapotement*, and *friction* that are associated with the classic massage of today. It involves the application of pressure to relax muscles to increase the oxygen flow in the blood and release toxins from the muscle. It is one of the most common and best known massage techniques used today. Ling gave scientific credibility to the massage stokes. He learnt the benefits of hands-on body treatment as a therapy from Ming, a Chinese martial artist and expert in Tui na. Massage and remedial exercise grew in popularity with English nurses providing musculoskeletal rehabilitation on injured British soldiers during the First World War. Demand for massage therapy grew in other areas of medicine and is commonly used in hospitals, nursing homes and birthing centres. It is also used in physical therapy and in chiropractic clinics to treat pain, increase circulation and accelerate the healing of injured muscles. Massage is also used as a preventative measure to maintain health and promote wellbeing.

## ■ Thalassotherapy

Thalassotherapy was developed by Dr. La Bonardhiere in 1867. Thalassotherapy is the use of seawater, sea products and shore climate as a form of therapy believed to have beneficial effects on the skin. The International Thalassotherapy Federation (Fédération Internationale de Thalassothérapie Mer & Santé) was founded in France, in 1986. France continues to be the centre for thalassotherapy and has nearly fifty thalassotherapy centres. The best-known thalassotherapy centres are in Biarritz, Saint-Jean-de-Luz and resorts in Brittany.

## ■ Growth of global spa therapies

The globalisation of the spa industry has inevitably led to a growth in spa therapies from around the world. It is possible to experience spa therapies that have their roots in ancient civilisations, and are increasingly focused on holistic health and wellbeing, and not just pampering and relaxation. For example, Temazcal is an ancient Mexican practice dating back to Mayan and Aztec cultures. The treatment,