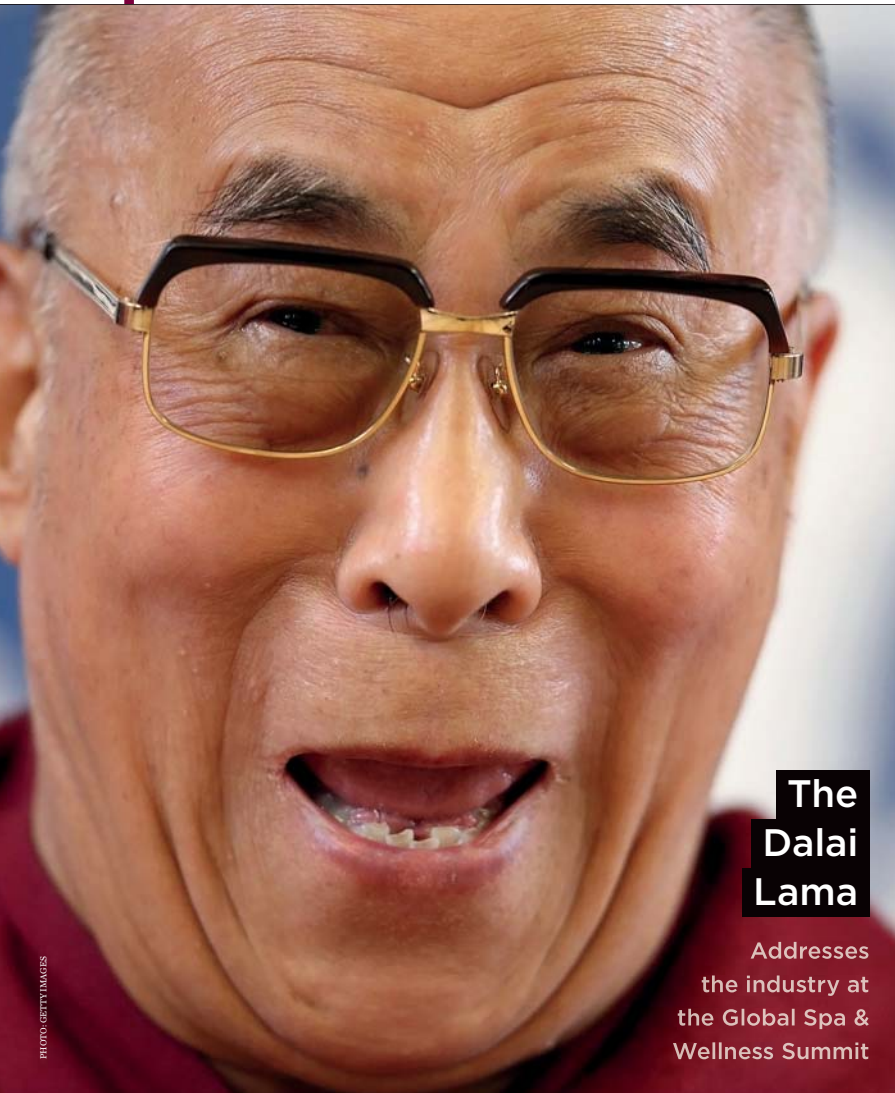


spa business



**The
Dalai
Lama**

Addresses
the industry at
the Global Spa &
Wellness Summit

Kathryn Moore

The operations director of MSpa International talks about the company's new fast track management programme, hot spa markets and a brand new wellness concept

KATIE BARNES, MANAGING EDITOR, SPA BUSINESS

Kathryn Moore has a passion for management. Straight out of school at 19, the native Australian from Perth started running nightclubs and restaurants – at one point overseeing 50 staff – before taking a two-year beauty therapy diploma in 2002 with a view to making a career out of operating spas. “I don’t think having a therapist qualification makes a huge amount of difference to running spas,” says Moore who’s now the director of operations – corporate support for MSpa International. “But it did give me more insight into what therapists go through and I think it’s helped me to be a better manager.”

In her first role at Retreat on Spring, an Aveda spa in Melbourne, Moore was mentored by Marie Prosperi-Porter and Julie-Anne Kelly – two well-known spa professionals in the country who “opened my eyes to how quickly the industry was growing”. Then, after managing the spa at Hilton Melbourne for two years, she relocated to Hua Hin, Thailand where an opportunity to join MSpa, a subsidiary of Asia’s Minor Hotel Group (MHG), as spa director for its Mandara Spa and Anantara Spa brands presented itself. Three years on, the 32-year-old has moved very quickly through the company to become “number two” to MSpa’s general manager Lee David Stephens (see p30) run-



Moore heads up international projects for MSpa as well as being operations director

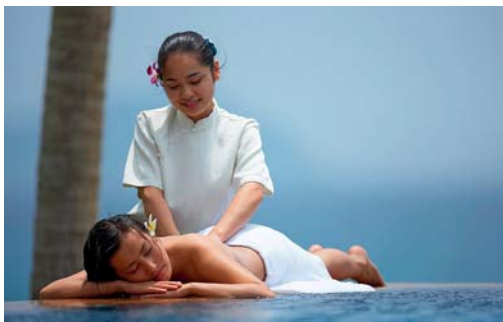
ning the its 44 spas and 450 staff across Asia, the Middle East and Africa, as well as heading up new developments and openings as its international project manager.

FAST TRACK MANAGEMENT

Faced, like the majority of the industry, with the lack of skilled spa managers – “I couldn’t find any to save my life!” – Moore has put together a fast track programme for beauty therapy graduates, in-house therapists and other professionals outside of the industry who show ambition and

management potential. After a six-month probation in a receptionist or therapist position, candidates will go through an 18-month mentoring programme shadowing top-level MSpa employees at various properties with the back-up of online training courses. Probation is important, she says, as they need to ensure candidates have a work ethic first.

With four people on the programme so far, Moore’s aim is find more recruits by developing stronger relationships with respected therapist training organisations/



Moore's target is to sign at least four new spa deals a year. She's created an 18-month spa management training programme to help with staff shortages

SHOPPING TRIP

Wearing her other MSpa hat, as the company's international project manager, Moore's target is to bring in at least four new deals for a year. "Getting owners to sign new deals is always exciting," she says, adding that it's one of the things she works closely with Stephens on. "If I'm in an area, it makes sense for me to do the presentation [to owners] and vice versa. I've spent quite a bit of time in the Middle East lately and he spends more time in China."

New deals are also quickly coming on line via company investments. "Mr Heinicke, our founder, and Dillip Rajakarier, our CEO are travelling on one of the company's private jets almost every week and come back with a brand new property or one to rebrand," says Moore. "It's become a bit of an in-house joke – 'what have you bought on your shopping trip this time?' – it means more work for us which is exciting, but it's pretty full on!" As it stands, Moore says there's around 25 projects she needs to get open in the next 18 months. ▶

schools, such as Elly Lukas in Australia. However, the sheer demand for managers means they may need to widen the net. "We need to start looking outside the industry," she says, "potentially looking at hotel F&B managers or front of house managers who already have an idea of how much hard work hospitality is and who have responsibility for a department's performance."

Making the switch to spa management would certainly be a lucrative move she adds: "The spa industry's paying more for managers than what hotels are – some spa

directors are on US\$6,000 a month. In the past GMs were on that money, and F&B/front of house managers are probably only earning around US\$2,000-US\$3,000."

Having employees with business-running backgrounds would certainly make her job to deliver on KPIs easier. As part of a public limited company MSpa is closely scrutinised on its performance. "It's my role to make sure 80 per cent of my managers, achieve 80 per cent of their KPIs," explains Moore. "I'd lie if I didn't say revenue was one of our most important benchmarks."



“ Nothing like this exists in the Middle East as return on investment is tough, but our owners are the Qatari royal family and they really want to have something different ”

► “We’ve got some amazing deals in the pipeline, but I’m going to need to bring in a few more people to help me handle them.”

HOT SPOTS

One of the newest projects is the rollout of Lime Spa – the branded concept for Per Aquum resorts (see SB06/1 p28) which MHG acquired a 50 per cent stake in just two months ago. With only three sites, the 10-year-old brand is not known in the hotel industry but MHG plans to change this. “We’re currently talking about what direction we’ll take it as we’re planning at least 15 resorts in coming years,” says Moore. “We were considering Lime Spa as a stand-alone

concept, but now think it’s best positioned exclusively for Per Aquum as a USP.”

With spas now standard in hotels, Moore says it’s “hard to see where you can get an extra dollar, or an extra guest into the spa.” However, the Maldives, Africa and the Middle East are still hot spots for successful spas, she feels. “Even though there are lots of resorts in the Maldives, there’s still big potential as there’s nothing else for guests to do and you’re pretty much guaranteed a 15-20 per cent capture rate.”

The potential in Africa – MSpa has 10 possible projects there – lies with professionals who, having studied abroad and gained a taste for western luxuries, are

returning to their homeland as it becomes more prosperous. “I was in a 200-bed hotel in Tanzania a few months ago that was getting 95 per cent year-round occupancy via corporate business at US\$450 (£341, £287) a night and US\$150-US\$200 (£114-£152, £96-£127) average spend in the spa – that’s amazing,” says Moore.

She also feels there’s high spending power in the Middle East. “Consumers there have a lot of money, however, they’re always looking for something fresh with the latest brands. If you don’t continue to evolve in that market, you’ll lose customers.”

It’s fitting, therefore, that MSpa has chosen Doha to launch a completely different ►

KATHRYN MOORE FAVOURITES

Book: I'm currently reading *The*

4-Hour Workweek by Tim Ferriss

Film: A tie between *Robin Hood:*

Prince of Thieves and *Love Actually*

Season: Spring

Non-MSpa spa: The Bliss

Spa in London does an amazing bespoke facial

Treatment: Thai massage

Advice: My parents taught me to never give up and to stand up for what I believe in (gets me in trouble sometimes!)

Who you admire? Not to sound like a swot, but both my bosses [William Heinecke and Dillip Rajakarier] are incredibly inspirational



There's lots of money for luxury spend in the Middle East, says Moore, adding that MSpa will soon reveal a full-service wellness concept to consumers in Qatar



concept to sit alongside its Anantara Spa. When the 13-hectare (32-acre) Anantara Doha Island Resort & Spa opens in early 2014, it will feature the company's first "full-on wellness concept" – a facility capable of hosting year-round long-stay retreats on detox, weight-loss and relaxation that mix alternative therapies with medi-spa treatments and doctors on staff. "We've haven't released details to the press yet as we're still finalising the offer" says Moore. "It's going to target the Middle East clientele who usually go to Asia, places like Chiva-Som, for those types of programmes. There are going to be more than 100 residential units [on the island] so it will target locals too.

"Nothing like this exists in the Middle East because the return on investment is tough, but our owners are the Qatari royal family and they really want to have something with a different angle."

This isn't the first time owners have expressed an interest in having a full-service wellness centre says Moore who's been researching concepts and viable business models for a few years now. Indeed Anantara has slowly introduced wellness retreats at different properties so it's already built up a base of experts and she sees no reason why they shouldn't continue with elements of wellness in the future as they refresh the Anantara Spa brand. "What we created five

year's ago isn't as relevant today," she says. "I'm looking into an intro level, such as more weekend retreats and a step up from that where we might offer lifestyle memberships and health check ups."

Overall, the next few years are going to prove exciting. "There aren't that many spa management companies in Asia or the Middle East," she says. "There's ESPA and a couple in the US but we get enquiries every day from owners wanting us to either create or manage a spa for them. There's huge potential for us to get more deals!" ●

Turn to p30 to read the interview with Lee David Stephens