

## GALLEN'S SPA NOTES



### LORD OF THE SPAS

A recent trip to New Zealand gave AOIBHEANN GALLEN plenty of ideas for Irish spas.

On my recent trip to New Zealand and Australia I explored the world of wellness.

My first visit was to the Hell's Gate & Wai Ora Spa, Rotorua in New Zealand's North Island. This beautiful area of New Zealand is renowned for its own unique natural resources. The Hell's Gate Reserve is the most active geothermal field in the Rotorua region and is home to many unique features, such as the largest hot waterfall in the Southern Hemisphere (Kakahi Falls), the only accessible mud volcano in a thermal reserve, steaming fumaroles, pools of boiling mud, land coral sulphur crystal deposits and many boiling pools with temperatures in excess of 100°C. The reason the thermal reserve is known widely as Hell's Gate is due to a visit from famous playwright George Bernard Shaw in the early 1900s. He decided on looking at the thermal reserve that this must be the gateway to Hell, however after being there a week it is understood that he changed his mind. The people were so taken by the playwright that they allowed the area to be known in English as Hell's Gate.

Hell's Gate & Wai Ora Spa is located onsite - a truly unique New Zealand health and spa complex, where visitors can experience an authentic mud bath - using mineral enriched volcanic muds, which come directly from the geothermal reserve. Visitors can also indulge in a relaxing soak in the sulphur spa with the sulphurous waters, again taken directly from the reserve. I spent half a day at the Wai Ora Spa and I found it a totally unique experience. The mud baths and sulphur water spas are all outdoors, yet private due to

clever planning. My therapist guided me to my mud bath, followed by my water experience and finally to my massage. The therapists carry out traditional New Zealand massage, which was one of the best treatments I have ever had. Of course the native Maori people of NZ have been using this natural reserve for medicinal purposes for years. There are no frills at this spa and you don't need them, as every step of your journey is unique. You are experiencing all the elements in truly authentic surroundings.

This year more than 70,000 people will visit Hells Gate & Wai Ora Spa, 70% of whom are from overseas. This spa's reputation is growing internationally, with the majority of the international market coming from Australia, USA and Europe. There is an increasing interest from many of the Asian markets also.

New Zealand's clean, green environment produces three major components, Manuka Oil, Manuka Honey and New Zealand milk, which are all used in various spa product ranges. They certainly integrate their own natural resources making their spa experiences and wellness truly authentic. This I believe is one of the key ingredients needed for Irish spas. As I discussed in *The Style Guide 2008*, people are starting to get nostalgic at the loss of locality when visiting certain spas. Irish spas could feature a more authentic style, to capture the Irish flora and fauna and diffusing this throughout the spa in every sense possible. This would offer our domestic, and most importantly our international visitors, a unique Irish spa experience and add to the country's USP. ♦

AOIBHEANN GALLEN, founder of Irelandspas, is Ireland's leading independent spa consultant. To find out more about Aoibheann and the services she offers to the industry log on to [www.irelandspas.com](http://www.irelandspas.com) or email her at [agallen@irelandspas.com](mailto:agallen@irelandspas.com).

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