



## GALLEN'S SPA NOTES



**This month, AOIBHEANN GALLEN joins the team at *Hotel & Catering Review* as our resident spa expert. In her inaugural column she charts Ireland's position in the global spa market.**

### INTRODUCING AOIBHEANN

Aoibheann Gallen, founder of Irelandspas, is Ireland's leading independent spa consultant.

She has built up an impressive career in the Irish wellness industry over the last 13 years, gaining vast experience in every aspect of wellness sector, previously managing a number of beauty salons, health farms and spas across Ireland and now working on a consultancy basis with the industry.

Aoibheann's unique approach to her therapy work has improved the health and wellbeing of her many clients including a number of Irish celebrities who she treats regularly.

As an authority in the wellness and beauty industry, Aoibheann is much sought after for advice on spas and wellness throughout Ireland and her aim is for Irelandspas.com to be the definitive website on the wellness sector in Ireland.

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).

## POURING FORTH ON SPAS

The word spa originates from the Latin verb 'Spagere - to pour forth'. With more and more people looking to spas for wellness, health, anti-aging and relaxation than ever before, spa-going has been described as the new cultural trend. In fact spa-going (ie social bathing in 'healing waters') has been practised for thousands of years - from the Egyptians to the Minoans to the Greeks and Romans and later the Ottomans, Japanese and Western Europeans.

The economic boom has brought a rapid change to Ireland; people have more disposable income, prosperity and busier lifestyles. Technology has made people more readily accessible and as a result people today are more stressed than ever. Their health is suffering and a growing concern for health is driving the demand for health tourism and spa services. Hence the wellness sector has been reborn and is now worth €20bn globally.

Society today is increasingly focused on prevention, healthy lifestyles, fitness, spirituality and relaxation. Since 2002, the spa growth in Ireland has been unmissable; this was mainly because of tax-break incentives, which are coming to an end soon. Much of the growth has been represented in the hotel or resort spa sector. In 2006 alone over 30 facilities opened. Today we have 170 (and growing) hotel spas in Ireland.

This rapid change within the wellness sector in Ireland has brought many opportunities, however it has brought concerns also as too many spas have been developed in such a short time span and this has brought about consequences. Building a 10,000-

40,000 sq ft spa doesn't necessarily mean a lasting product that generates revenue, especially if the concept and design isn't in place first and foremost.

I was recently invited to the European Spa Summit and to the launch of Spa Finder Europe in Paris. This was an interesting event which highlighted to me even more just how advanced the European spas are, especially in Germany, Spain, Italy, France and Austria. It is currently estimated that the number of active spa-goers in these big markets is nearly 38 million - 20% more than the US. These consumers travel and in fact there were 458 million arrivals to EU destinations in 2006, 54% of the global total and 88% were Europe to Europe. In the five key European markets there are 25,000 day and stay spas, compared to 15,700 in the US.

Spa customers are attractive guests as they outstay and outspend regular hotel guests. Other interesting facts from the US is that there are now twice as many adults interested in visiting a spa on holidays as there are adults interested in playing golf on holidays. Ireland's spa and health tourism must keep up with international standards so to have a competitive advantage. We want the spa-goers to come back and visit our facilities in Ireland, so it's up to us to set the standards and embrace the wellness sector. To do this, Ireland's wellness sector needs to be positioned more distinctively, like our European counterparts. In this column over the coming issues I hope to offer my readers more insight into the wellness sector and keep you updated with international trends. I will also be touching on spa consultancy advice for facilities being upgraded and newly built. ♦