

Overseas property: Wellness Centres

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Spas are just so passé, darling. Cheryl Markosky experiences life at a Wellness centre

This year, more than 25,000 Britons will fly to Budapest for bargain dental work. Another few thousand will plump for cut-price cosmetic surgery (you won't go bust paying only £700 per Pamela Anderson-style breast implant), or corrective laser surgery at less than £300 per eye.

Some, however, are going a stage further and buying a holiday home on a development with a "wellness" centre, where medically trained staff give you the once-over on arrival and prescribe treatments for any ailments you might be suffering. One up from the spa -spas are just so passé these days, darling -the wellness concept is threaded through every aspect of your stay on the resort.

"This is way beyond feeling good in a cosmetic way. It becomes a state of mind physically, spiritually and environmentally," explains Jeremy Tomalin-Reeves from Three Sisters Mountain Village in western Canada's Rocky Mountains.



Pool your resources: the Maniero di Mezzole in Umbria offers conventional and alternative therapies

He has carried out research at the top-end wellness centres in Arizona and New York, where overweight, overstressed and over there Americans "get check-ups from the best doctors, who give them a programme for two weeks in a boot-camp kind of way", as Tomalin-Reeves puts it.

Although Three Sisters probably won't force us to get healthy in quite the same enthusiastic way, baby boomers -the prime targets in this market, according to Tomalin-Reeves -favour the idea of general practitioners, chiropractors and alternative practitioners such as acupuncturists being on tap in its wellness centre, which will be completed in two years.

advertisement The sad truth is many of us don't have the time or inclination to go to our own doctors, so why not jump NHS queues and take advantage of such services when relaxing in our overseas property?

Four years ago, Rosemary and Mike Gledhill, both 61 and from Hampshire, bought a £170,000 three-storey, three-bedroom home at Three Sisters. Rosemary, a former nurse, says the wellness centre was a deciding factor. "It goes with our philosophy of a healthy life in the mountains," she says.

The Gledhills are not sure what treatments they will choose -"It all comes down to cost and what is on offer," she adds -but the principle of fixing the injured and ill in a holistic way appeals to them.

Canny owners keen to rent out their property when they're not there will see the marketing potential of this new trend, too.

The Amrit condo-hotel oceanfront project on Singer Island, at the northern tip of Palm Beach, Florida, has to be the master when it comes to selling wellness to the masses.

Aveda Resort and Residences is working with the Himalayan Institute, "combining the inner science of the east with the modern comforts of the west" for those happy to part with £307,000 or more for one of 285 condominiums, beach villas or hotel residences (essentially apartment suites).

Patricia Ellis, of Sunrise Homes International, is marketing homes at Amrit (meaning "the elixir or essence of life, the drink of rejuvenation" from the ancient Sanskrit). "Allergy testing, nutritional advice and the creation of personalised fragrances for each resident will run alongside medical help for sports and stress-related injuries," she says.



Splashing out: the pool at the Orchard in Bankso, Bulgaria

But you don't have to cross the Atlantic to embrace this new notion of wellness linked to property. Europe is getting in on the act as well.

Maniero di Melezzole is an Umbrian hotel and health centre based round a 14th-century tower. A cardiologist, ultrasound technician and paediatrician work with Marc Messugue, who comes from a family of herbalists, to detoxify and de-stress the residents of 28 studio, one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments (priced from £101,745), and those renting them in the owners' absence.

"There is a family angle here," points out Luca Catalano from Realinvest, "where everyone is encouraged to use the indoor pool, sauna, Turkish bath and tropical showers." The hotel will rent out and manage homes for buyers, taking 40 per cent of profits.

Not everyone is convinced that wellness centres are the latest must-have for overseas property owners. Bulgarian Dreams is selling studios, one- and two-bedroom apartments from £32,400 at The Orchard in the mountain resort of Bansko, which has what is described as the most luxurious spa in Bulgaria.

David Smith from Bulgarian Dreams is convinced that the multi-level complex, which offers therapeutic massages, salt thalasso therapy and ayurvedic treatments, is advanced enough to tend even the most unfit visitor's needs.

But he is sceptical about going all the way with the wellness concept. "People in America, say, can be quite litigious. I would be wary of renting out my home to someone who might turn round and sue if a treatment didn't turn out as expected."

Smith accepts, however, that if there is demand for more medically-based treatments then it might be worth exploring. "Historically, people have come to the mineral spa towns of eastern Europe for vigorous massages by big scary-looking women in white coats," he says.

"If they want to go abroad for root canal work and liposuction as well, then we could consider providing it. But obviously, we must err on the side of caution."

Contacts

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The Orchard: Bulgarian Dreams 020 7614 1240 www.bulgariandreams.com

Pros

- Cash-rich, time-poor executives will want to rent your home so they can get a health check at the wellness centre
- Cost is about the same as buying into spas -but you will be ahead of the pack with this new trend
- Wellness centres appeal to baby boomers; there will be 78.2 million alone from America by 2020

Cons

- Liability risk if something went wrong
- A new concept with British buyers, wellness could take a while to catch on

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