



Penny Ellis, a 40-year spa veteran and founder of Bali BISA (The Bali International Spa Academy), has been widely recognised for her educational excellence by Indonesian authorities. Her academy has also been commended by the prestigious spa industry international awarding body, CIBTAC. For the second year in a row, Bali BISA is a finalist as the CIBTAC Centre of the Year 2015, for which the winner will be announced on June 21, 2015. Penny's vision of excellence through professionalism has allowed thousands of students from around the world to realise their goals within the approximately budgeted \$3.4 trillion global wellness industry, with a projected growth rate of 10 per cent per annum over the coming years. She speaks to Nipun Augustine Jacob on her vision and outlook for the spa business.



What makes your academy an award winning concept?

The high standard of our trainers is one of the main factors that set us apart from other spa and massage schools. Each educator is selected based on their previous overseas work experience, plus they are given extensive testing on their physical techniques, product knowledge and English comprehension before being accepted. They all undertake three months of hands-on training before being allowed to teach any student. Our manuals are extensively researched and detailed. Our students appreciate such a comprehensive reference tool to use when they begin to apply their new skills professionally.

Our class sizes are also small so students get individual attention based on their level of expertise. The atmosphere in our premises is friendly and intimate; students feel relaxed and at peace. This enhances their learning abilities effectively and quickly. Our training is such that the students are always well-prepared for written and physical examinations on Fridays, every week. We offer our own Bali BISA branded courses and CIBTAC accredited courses. Additionally we are the only spa training facility to offer CIBTAC endorsed courses, currently with an offering of eight programs.

We continue to add courses to suit the needs of more savvy spa goers. For example, we have recently added A-Shiatsu and Javanese Massage to our list as these are growing in popularity. We also invite renowned international guest trainers and faculty to lead workshops. For example we collaborate with Moving Ventures for which one of their educators holds regular workshops in Touching Essence Massage. People today are willing to try new and different modalities, so it is important that we keep up with the latest wellness trends.

What do you advise on running a sustainable spa business?

Every destination is different, so being sustainable is not the same for every spa. However, conservation of natural resources is key everywhere. In Bali, there is an imminent water shortage according to the experts, so we are extremely careful with our water consumption. We have an eco-friendly approach to the school operations. We teach safety and hygiene as part of our course curriculums, but we feel it is crucial that students experience, adopt and practice all of these on a day-to-day basis at the academy. Fortunately, our school layout takes advantage of Bali's tropical weather, so we have an open air plan which means use of air conditioning is very limited.

We purchase all of our products locally and in bulk which is fundamental to keep transportation costs to a minimum and reduce excess packaging. We have found that by minimising the use of natural resources, we save quite a lot of money each year which means our school is also financially sustainable in the long-term. Yet, this has been without compromising the satisfaction and comfort of our students and staff. We follow best practices when it comes to sustainability and share these with on our website and social media.

India is fast housing a growing number of spa operators, though many are fly-by-night. What are your do's and dont's in achieving both high service standards and financial performance for a spa?

Well, consistency of the highest professional standards ensure that customers will remain loyal. In some cases, a programme to reward repeat clients can also be effective. Social media is a low cost way to maintain a strong relationship with customers and attract new clientele. Give them information on new techniques and developments and present your spa as an expert that can help on their path to total wellness. High customer retention will lead to profitability as long as the prices are matched to the quality of service being offered.

Training and HR are big challenges for spa companies in India. How would you advise them in terms of creating, nurturing and retaining human talent?

Motivation and training are key issues to retain a talented team. Most spa therapists desire to keep learning new skills and techniques, so a thorough annual training plan is essential. There are often existing personnel with specific expertise that they can pass onto other employees. Many times outside trainers will come in for free if there is the possibility they can promote their products. Workshop leaders will also include staff in their program as long as there is space. Not letting them get into a rut will keep them pleasantly challenged.

Also, giving high performing employees crucial management skills will help boost their opportunities to become Spa Managers and Directors for which there is a real shortage of in this booming field. Naturally, rewarding them financially is also critical. A generous commission system will ensure they are willing to work harder and more consciously over the long term.

In terms of day-to-day management, senior level staff need to be consistently interacting with spa therapists with positive or constructive feedback. Although some amount of paperwork is inevitable, being out in the spa on a regular basis will ensure quality standards are upheld and staff genuinely feel appreciated.