

# spa business



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“We want to elevate standards and give credibility to the industry”



Andrew Gibson



Anne Dimon



Thomas Klein

# Travelling well

A group of industry veterans has come together to create a not-for-profit business to help define the wellness sector, market it to tour operators, and create networking, education and marketing opportunities for those in the industry.

Headed up by chair Andrew Gibson – who is Accor Hotels’ vice president of wellbeing – the Wellness Tourism Association (WTA) aims to create a network for destination marketing organisations, hotels and resorts, tour operators and travel agencies that have an interest in the growing wellness tourism industry.

“As an association, it is crucial that we work together to help define our industry, as well as to educate the public so they can recognise legitimate and credible wellness suppliers and operators,” says Gibson.

Gibson is joined by founding members Anne Dimon, CEO of Travel to Wellness, who serves as the WTA’s president; Thomas Klein, president and COO of US

The Wellness Tourism Association is a new initiative that hopes to be the voice of the industry. Jane Kitchen talks to the people behind the organisation



destination spa Canyon Ranch, who is the organisation’s treasurer; Madeleine Marentette, founder of Canada’s Grail Springs Retreat Center for Wellbeing; and Nilendu Srivastava, managing director of The Art of Living Retreat Center in North Carolina, US. Cindy Hoddeson of the Monaco Government Tourist Office is the association’s first tourism board member.

## Defining the industry

The WTA’s goals are to create a common set of standards and definitions of wellness travel categories; educate and increase awareness of wellness tourism, especially among tour operators and travel agents; and to provide a networking platform for those involved in the industry. “The WTA will define the industry and

unite all the various categories that fall under the umbrella of wellness tourism for a common purpose – which is the benefit and sustainability of the industry for the ultimate good of all, including the consumer,” says Dimon.

But the first step is to create the industry definitions for various terms within the sector. As Gibson explains: “We want to elevate standards and give credibility to the industry. There’s so much vagueness, so much lack of clarity – when we get the industry speaking with a unified voice, then we can go to the consumer with it.”

That includes defining a destination spa versus a resort spa, for instance, and looking at defining wellness retreats, wellness travel and wellness vacation





● The Wellness Tourism Association hopes to unite the categories that fall under the umbrella of wellness tourism, and to market the sector

### Growing consumer demand

"The wellness tourism market is working overtime to keep up with the growing consumer demand, and that includes Canyon Ranch," says Klein. "Wellness tourism – travel engaged for the purpose of enriching or sustaining the state of wellness – will continue to evolve, and as a trailblazer in the integrative wellness industry, it's crucial that we are at the centre of the discussion and movement, working with the industry to define and develop this booming travel sector, along with the immersive wellness experience."

Klein said when Canyon Ranch first opened 40 years ago, most travellers didn't even know what wellness or wellbeing meant; today, the wellness tourism sector is a US\$563bn industry, and is growing faster than the tourism industry itself.

"We're experiencing a phenomenon where health is creeping into all aspects of consumer life and experience," he explains. "This association is needed now, more than ever, to provide those connected to or interested in any



aspect of wellness tourism with an opportunity to have a voice in this industry, and to help shape its future."

### Membership

The WTA made its official debut in late January at the Travel & Adventure Show in Washington, DC, and will also have a presence at three other Travel & Adventure Shows in 2018. Qualifying hotels, resorts, retreats, destination spas, tour operators and wellness travel companies may join as members, and organisations with a specific interest in the sector may join as partners. Membership packages range from US\$300 (€242, £214) for travel advisors to

US\$2,000 (€1,615, £1,425) for hotels and destination spas and US\$3,500 (€2,826, £2,495) for tourism boards and DMOs.

"If an organisation has a true interest and investment in the travel sector, they will want to be part of this industry-focused collective," says Dimon.

Networking opportunities will begin straight away; WTA is planning an annual meeting. The WTA also plans to collaborate with the Global Wellness Summit's Wellness Tourism Initiative.

Gibson is bullish on the organisation's future. "This is going to be a collective effort to be part of shaping what is to be," he says. ●

Details: [wellnesstourismassociation.org](http://wellnesstourismassociation.org)