



Emerging Trends in the Hot Springs Resort Industry

Geothermal properties are experiencing a rapid resurgence with a positive outlook ahead.

By [Vicky Nash](#) CEO, Hot Springs Connection, Inc. | July 04, 2021



More than ever before, people are seeking out ways to naturally boost their immune systems. Soaking in thermal mineral water is an effective method to enhance well-being and promote health. Humans have been utilizing the benefits of hot springs for centuries. In the past year, this sector has experienced enormous growth.

In May 2021, 130 industry leaders gathered together at the Hot Springs Connection conference which was first established in 2018 specifically for owners and operators of thermal mineral water facilities. This important collaboration works to unify the hot

springs resort industry in this country. A primary goal of this organization is to enhance public perception about hot springs and help create a variety of meaningful guest experiences.

The meeting was held at Quinn's Hot Springs Resort located one hour northwest of Missoula, Montana on the bank of the Clark Fork River surrounded by the Lolo National Forest. This was an excellent opportunity for Montana to highlight the abundance of hot springs facilities in this state.



Quinn's Hot Springs Resort, near Missoula, Montana

Special Waters

Geothermal springs are a naturally occurring phenomenon where rainwater deep within the earth's crust is super-heated by magma. This water makes its way to the surface through cracks and fissures. In this journey, the liquid dissolves minerals from the surrounding rock. Each hot spring is completely unique with differing mineral content and temperatures. There are geothermal areas all over the United States with the highest concentration in the west.

Health and Wellness Attributes

The practice of thermal mineral spring water therapy is often recommended to revitalize the skin, calm nerves and detoxify the body. It is also useful in providing relief from arthritis, fibromyalgia, depression, as well as locomotor and circulatory disorders. The calming effect of water generally reduces stress, relaxes muscles which in turn improves sleep patterns. Recent research indicates that regular hydrothermal treatments significantly enhances the body's immune system so it can more effectively ward off threats of disease.

Pandemic Protocol

During the pandemic, the majority of outdoor hot springs pools in the United States were able to continue operations at reduced capacities as long as they adhered to specific safety guidelines. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) consistently proclaims that there is no scientific evidence that viruses such as COVID-19 spread to people through the water in pools, hot tubs, water playgrounds, or other treated aquatic venues. Therefore, many patrons felt that their favorite soaking venue was a safe haven.



Astoria Hot Springs Park near Jackson, Wyoming

Resort Design and Development

During the past year-and-a-half, forward-thinking proprietors used their lockdown time very productively by implementing major improvements. Restoration and revitalization of historic properties is the most prominent activity. Various renovations are maximizing and optimizing their onsite natural resources. Providing more private spaces is also gaining popularity with the addition of individual soaking tubs, tents, domes, yurts and tiny homes.

The Hot Springs Connection conference host Quinn's Hot Springs Resort in Paradise, Montana showcased the addition of their newly constructed pool area featuring a variety of soaking options at different temperatures surrounded by rock walls, waterfalls, and multi-colored lighting.

Astoria Hot Springs Park near Jackson, Wyoming unveiled a newly constructed pool complex overlooking the Snake River after the community-owned facility had been removed 20 years ago. Durango Hot Springs Resort and Spa completely transformed an aging facility in southwest Colorado.

Historically significant spa towns like Truth-or-Consequences, New Mexico and Desert Hot Springs, California have an abundance of in-room private soaking mineral spring tubs. Blackstone Hot Springs added more themed rooms and Azure Palm Hot Springs has new luxury suites.

Ten Thousand Waves in Santa Fe, New Mexico converted all communal bathing pools to private suites - each with a bathroom, changing area, and shower. A large outdoor pavilion was added to the restaurant allowing for year-round outdoor dining.

Plans are in the works for the 3000-acre Aetna Springs Resort in Napa Valley, California. Originally built in the 1870s, components include over 70 guest cottages and 18 glamping tent villas amongst the 23-acre vineyard.

Expansion is underway at Iron Mountain Hot Springs in Glenwood Springs, Colorado with the addition of ten new rock-bottom, adult-only pools along with an additional bathhouse, doubling the size of this six-year-old attraction.

In downtown Palm Springs, the Agua Caliente Band of the Cahuilla Indians will soon open the 40,000 square foot Spa at Sec-he designed to celebrate their sacred healing waters.

There are also several undeveloped parcels in conceptual stages. One of the conference seminars emphasized the importance of having a master plan in place particularly when working with the unique settings and special challenges of geothermal locations. Incorporating high quality design is imperative when creating extraordinary experiences.



Glen Ivy Hot Springs Spa in Corona, California.

Connecting with Nature

Discussions revolved around creating more outdoor experiences. Decidedly, guests are seeking more connections to nature. Converting an outdoor patio into a spa treatment area proved to be very successful at Glen Ivy Hot Springs Spa in Corona, California. Castle Hot Springs north of Phoenix, Arizona recently built a Via Ferrata course, a 200-foot aerial walkway high above a canyon floor with ladders, rungs and steel cables affixed to mountainside.

Back-of-the-House Site Tours

A favorite activity at past conferences is the behind-the-scenes tour. This year's participants got an up-close look at the brand-new pools at Quinn's Hot Springs Resort and obtained in-depth knowledge on operating procedures. This was followed by a candid discussion about the entire construction process including the challenges.

Off-site, attendees had the opportunity to visit nearby Hot Springs, Montana. Founded in 1910 at the edge of the Flathead Indian Reservation, the town is named for the local geothermal waters that still bubble throughout the area. Hot Springs was famous in the late 1940s through the 1960s for a 21-day cure at the Camas Bathhouse complex operated by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes. The town's motto is still "Limp in, leap out."

Regulatory Guidelines

Natural geothermal water is significantly different than a typical municipal swimming pool. Unfortunately, there are no separate designations when it comes to regulations, therefore most hot springs resorts are required to adhere to standard chlorine requirements. The use of chlorine generally degrades the integrity of the water's mineral content so many facilities would prefer not to introduce this chemical. Lively discussions commenced on how to influence legislation to alter chlorination requirements for hot springs facilities.

Through science-based guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Model Aquatic Health Code (MAHC) is the only all-inclusive national pool code that addresses current aquatic issues. An overarching goal for the hot springs industry is to establish new language within the MAHC specifically acknowledging and addressing geothermal mineral waters, their unique benefits and how they should be managed for public use and benefit.



Azure Palm Hot Springs in Desert Hot Springs, California

Operations

Another primary goal of the Hot Springs Connection is developing standardized operating procedures for hot springs facilities along with the creation of a certification educational program.

Other highly sought-after technology-oriented improvements are automatic identification devices and systems including key cards, waterproof key wristbands, mobile key room activation, towel and linen inventory control, among others.

The group identified an urgent need for a seamless multi-faceted software management system designed specifically for the resort/hospitality industry, with a focus on locations that provide lodging, spa, athletic club, retail, food & beverage and activities.

Hydrology control is all about water quality, clarity, filtration and flow rates. An innovative process that utilizes oxygen, ozone and CO2 provides an intriguing alternative.

Distributing and moving water is another vital step. Selecting the right pump for the right job is critical. Several alternatives are on the market.

The potential for capturing and utilizing geothermal energy is vast. Heat recovery technology is a viable and cost-effective means of using heat to generate power. This natural resource is also used for snowmelt purposes and heated walkways and decks.

Advisers addressed increasing insurance costs and peers shared insight on drowning risks.

An expert in the areas of leadership, service innovation and motivation reviewed customer service and hospitality training techniques and addressed the current issue of workforce shortages.

Post-Pandemic Procedures

This question was posed during a roundtable session, "What did your property successfully implement during the pandemic that will continue to be regular operating procedure?"

The number one response was requiring reservations with designated soaking times at specific increments. This ultimately reduced maximum capacity levels and actually provided a much better guest experience. Reservation times are completely sold-out on a regular basis.

Pricing adjustments eliminated discounts and increased admission rates which ultimately increased revenues. Surprisingly, many hot springs resorts posted a record-breaking year in 2020.

Traditionally, patrons rent towels for daily use. The pandemic changed that model so guests were then given the option to purchase towels, thus adding another revenue stream and eliminating the need for laundry service.

One progressive Idaho owner described the Certified B Corp process and explained how his business focus is on diversity and sustainability.



Iron Mountain Hot Springs in Glenwood Springs, Colorado

Specialty Products

Gaining momentum is one popular Montana manufacturer who replicates the mineral content of a particular spring then provides private-label packaging for resale. A variety of CBD retail products can also be customized. For eco-friendly options, buyers are selecting robes made from recycled plastic bottles as well as durable reusable sandals.

Collaboration and Resources

The directors of the [Balneology Association of North America](#) (BANA) did a deep dive into the language of the waters to inform, educate and raise general awareness to the benefits found in mineral water bathing.

The newly formed [U.S. Hot Springs Business & Trade Association](#) provided an update on the evolution of this organization and how to participate.

On display was a very successful collaborative tourism marketing effort called the [Colorado Historic Hot Springs Loop](#) spearheaded by Vicky Nash.

The Hot Springs Connection just launched a new website called [Hot Springs of America](#) which lists and maps every commercial hot springs facility in the United States.

The Global Wellness Institute's Hot Springs Initiative provides a number of resources such as the [Guide To Hydrothermal Spa & Wellness Development Standards](#). These are available to anyone at no cost.

There are numerous opportunities to get involved with international public relations campaigns, available to any organization at no cost:

- [World Bathing Day](#) on June 22
- [World Wellness Weekend](#) on September 18-19
- [Soakember](#) on November 13

Overall, the hot springs industry is thriving with strong growth predicted for the future. Incorporating hydrothermal treatments into facilities is proving to be a successful endeavor.



Ms. Nash

With vast tourism industry experience spanning nearly 40 years, Vicky Nash has maintained long-time relationships with destination marketing organizations, convention & visitor bureaus, tourism associations, historic sites, attractions, resorts, hotels, hot springs, and spas. After gaining experience in group tour operation and destination management, Ms. Nash established the tourism communications firm Resort Trends, Inc. 20 years ago and has worked with over 50 clients. Resort Trends also manages and coordinates operations for two collaborative industry trade associations, the Tourism Industry Association of Colorado (TIAC) and the Colorado Association of Destination Marketing Organizations (CADMO). Specializing in geothermal tourism, Ms. Nash oversees the Colorado Historic Hot Springs Loop and recently founded two businesses, Hot Springs Connection Inc. and Hot Springs of America Inc., thus providing expertise and perspective on the global hot springs industry. She serves as a founding board member for the U.S. Hot Springs Business & Trade Association.

Extended Biography & Contact Information

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