



**HEALTH TOURISM & ESTORIL RESORT'S REBIRTH:  
From Thermal Springs to the Contemporary Wellness Centre**

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**Cristina Carvalho**

Estoril Higher Institute for Tourism and Hotel Studies, Portugal

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## Resumo

Situado nos arredores atlânticos de Lisboa, durante séculos o Estoril foi afamado pelas nascentes termais cujas águas se associavam a lenda do Século XII sobre um cavalo cuja vitalidade foi recuperada após o animal nelas se banhar. O líquido abençoado foi quimicamente estudado a partir de meados do Século XVIII e experimentado por D. José I. Sobretudo a partir de 1880, a prestigiança estada real e a situação costeira do Estoril justificariam o incremento de aquisitas ao longo do Século XIX e as melhorias de balneário e alojamento.

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Em 1913 o empresário Fausto Figueiredo adquiriu propriedades e projectou uma estância internacional à altura dos padrões de elegância da elite europeia, apostando quatro azes no sucesso do futuro Estoril: situação costeira, clima, nascentes termais e desporto. Gerido pela Sociedade Estoril-*Plage*, o novo balneário integrava o Hotel do Parque, cujas instalações, formação de colaboradores, equipamentos, tratamentos, programas desportivos e de lazer orgulhavam Portugal. Contudo, após a perda da concessão de Jogo em 1958, os gestores do complexo termal decidiram-se pela sua demolição em 1961. Durante décadas a hegemonia do banho solar, a inexistência de balneário e a comoção política e social do país conduziram ao esquecimento das nascentes do Estoril.

Este estudo empírico baseia-se na tese de doutoramento da autora, mas inclui também dados recentes recolhidos de abordagens teóricas sobre práticas contemporâneas, além de elementos conferidos através de contacto directo com o *Wellness Centre* do Estoril e agentes turísticos.

Enquanto que em 2008 jogos de poder obliteraram a Junta de Turismo da Costa do Estoril, em 2010 os agentes locais reviveram a identidade termal do Estoril ao inaugurar um *Wellness Centre* de linhas coevas. Associando-se ao grupo asiático *Banyan Tree*, a filosofia basilar dos actuais gestores assenta em preceitos holísticos e sustentáveis. Em termos promocionais, a inclusão do Palácio Estoril Hotel, *Spa & Golf* no exigente guia *Condé Nast Johansens Luxury Spas 2016* auxilia o renascimento internacional do Estoril enquanto a única estância de saúde de Lisboa e uma das melhores da Europa, tendo em conta microclima, situação costeira, programas de lazer e recursos turísticos edificados disponíveis. Assim como já foi, o Estoril sê-lo-á de novo.

**Palavras-Chave:** *Banyan Tree Group*; Estoril; Nascentes Termais; Turismo de Saúde; *Wellness Centre*.



## Abstract

Set in the Atlantic outskirts of Lisbon, Estoril was for centuries renowned for the thermal springs whose waters were linked to the 12<sup>th</sup>-century legend of a horse whose vitality was regained after bathing in them. The blessed liquid was chemically studied from the mid-1700s on and experimented by King Joseph I. The prestigious royal presence and Estoril's coastal setting justified the growth of attendants across the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the improvement of bath house and lodging facilities, especially from 1880 onwards.

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By 1913 the entrepreneur Fausto Figueiredo purchased estates and projected an international resort matching Europe's elite's standards of elegance, betting four aces on Estoril's future success: seaside location, climate, thermal springs, and sports. Managed by the Estoril-*Plage* Society, the new bath house was now part of *Hotel do Parque* whose facilities, staff training, equipments, treatments, sporting and leisure programmes were Portugal's pride. However, after losing the resort's Gambling concession in 1958, the managers of the thermal venue decided to demolish it in 1961. For decades the hegemony of sun bathing, the lack of a bath house, and Portugal's social and political unrest led Estoril's springs to oblivion and its waters to (oceanic) waste.

This empirical study is based on the author's Ph.D thesis, but it also includes recent data collected from theoretical approaches on contemporary practices, besides elements bestowed through the contact with Estoril's Wellness Centre and tourism promoters.

Recently, while in 2008 powerplay obliterated the Estoril Coast Tourism Authority, in 2010 local stakeholders were to revive Estoril's thermal identity by inaugurating a Wellness Centre of contemporary lines. In association with the Asian Banyan Tree Group, the current managers' pivotal philosophy relies on sustainability and holistic concerns. Promotionwise, the insertion of *Palácio Estoril Hotel, Spa & Golf* in the demanding *Condé Nast Johansens Luxury Spas 2016* guide assists in Estoril's international rebirth as Lisbon's only updated health resort and one of Europe's finest, considering its microclimate, seaside location, leisure programmes and man-made tourist assets available. As it was once, so it shall hopefully be again.

**Keywords:** Banyan Tree Group; Estoril; Health Tourism; Thermal Springs; Wellness Centre.



## Introduction

Set in the Atlantic outskirts of Lisbon, Estoril was for centuries renowned for the thermal springs whose properties generations of natives and visitors sought until 1961. With the demolition of the outdated bath house, the hegemony of sun bathing and Portugal's social and political unrest, 50 years went by in a flash with Estoril's waters flowing into oblivion and (oceanic) waste. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century brought new concerns on destination sustainability and individual well-being, and Estoril's stakeholders decided to update the resort's identity with the erection of a Wellness Centre of contemporary lines and holistic practices, forging an alliance with the Asian Banyan Tree Group.

This empirical study is based on the author's Ph.D thesis, but it also includes data collected from theoretical approaches on contemporary thermal and wellness practices, besides elements bestowed through the contact with Estoril's Wellness Centre and tourism promoters.

It is important to start by recalling that in 1986 the World Health Organisation (WHO) released the Ottawa Charter where the health paradigm shifted from healing to prevention, and the 1988 Adelaide Conference defended a new vision on public health as a universal right linked to social justice and equity (Gustavo, 2010). Wellness is not a whim due to three perceivable mega-trends: (1) the world's population's aging; (2) the failure of traditional medical systems; (3) and the consumer's growing awareness of alternative health practices thanks to the Internet's hegemony. (Ardel, 2011: 9)

## Methodology

On the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016 an interview was conducted to the Director of Operations and to the Coordinator of the Therapeutic Department of Estoril's Wellness Centre, Mr. Nuno Simões Coelho and Mr. António Abrantes, respectively. Prior to the meeting the author prepared a set of questions on services offered, attendants' profile, promotional strategies and plans for the near future after reading studies by Chen & Prebensen & Huan (2008), Joukes & Gerry (2010), Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz (2014), besides others listed below. To complement the data retrieved, the author also contacted Cascais Tourism Association (*Associação de Turismo de Cascais*) to ask for statistics; a 2015 inquiry on the satisfaction of the tourists visiting the municipality along with recent numbers on sleepovers were provided.

The recent recovery of the thermal venue in Estoril explains the lack of previous elements to assist the current analysis, but hopefully in a near future this simple proposition might clear the path for an increasing scientific perception on the resort's renewed thermal bet.

## Literature Review

### Historic and Theoretical Approach

The Celts' devotion to Nature, namely to springs where battle wounds would heal, prove their awareness of certain sites' special features. But it were the Romans who erected bath houses and aqueducts that stood the test of time and attest some areas'



importance linked to their springs, as one finds in Bath (England), Baden (Germany), Spa (Belgium), or Aqua Flaviae (Chaves, Portugal). Thermal venues were meeting points where socialising and business occurred, and a health protocol was kept (different compartments for specific treatments). From the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries the Christian church imposed strict rules where nakedness was a sign of lust, therefore, a sin, hence the depictions of rulers as long-haired, bearded men, alongside the Church's control over thermal spots (Cantista, 2008/2010). Hot baths were then catalogued as “notorious sites for inciting to physical pleasure and the opinion was sustained by St. Jerome's, who saw them as an attempt against chastity.” (Quintela, 2004: 4)

In 1485 the wife of John II of Portugal witnessed peasants bathing in stenchy, muddy waters c.80 Km north of Lisbon, and tradition states she experimented them herself and found relief for some sort of affliction. Soon Queen Leonor ordered the building of bath house, hospital and church to heal poor and wealthy alike, and a town ensued. It is still known as *Caldas da Rainha* (the Queen's Baths) and retains the oldest thermal unit in the world still running since 1485, but management and promotional issues refrain it from presenting a solid candidature to UNESCO. With the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Scientific Revolution a pragmatic understanding of chemical composition, therapeutic indication and geographic distribution of spas emerged. State “concern for the regulation of the use of, and therapies dealing with, mineral waters, and sea waters goes as far back, in France for instance, as even Louis XIV”, whose *Académie des Sciences* was at the forefront of these trends (Charlier & Chaineux, 2009: 838). Portugal's earliest medical study dates from 1726, with John V's physician Francisco Henriques publishing *Aquilégio Medicinal*, thus listing and classifying national springs (including Estoril's). (Cantista, 2008/2010)

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards spas became leisure centres for Europe's elites. As the centuries unfolded thermal venues and towns were renovated (new bath houses, lodging units, and facilities like theatres, opera houses, casinos), further attracting visitors to areas like Baden-Baden, Marienbad, or Spa (Boekstein, 2014). Cantista (2008/2010) defends the ‘season’ was thus created and added references like Vichy, Aix-les-Bains, Bath, Brighton, and Caldas da Rainha. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Europe's Industrial Revolution was well-under way, leading to dreadful atmospheric and sanitary conditions, and forcing doctors to recommend natural settings. One refers to mountain sanatoria stations set at the Swiss Alps, climatic stations in Madeira and Lisbon's outskirts (Parede-Estoril-Cascais), maritime stations in the French Riviera, or thermal sites across Europe. New trends on hygiene away from urban centres were a sign of civility, and Tourism was its prevalent hint with Thomas Cook and the railways setting the tone.

In 1892 Portugal published the 1<sup>st</sup> concession law, leading to the improvement of bath houses and complementary structures, alongside the expansion of the railways explaining the renewed appeal over spa sites like Luso, Vidago, São Pedro do Sul, among others (Mangorrinha & Pinto, 2015). When the Republic was proclaimed in 1910 the new regime perceived Tourism as a key segment for the economic and promotional development of the Portugal, and Estoril's project was its finest bet as one refers ahead. The 1930s witnessed the transition from the “Thermal Era to the Suntan Age” (Carvalho, 2016a: 198); by the 1950s the Mediterranean resorts' and the open-air physical activities' prominence plus a new medical belief contributed to the decadence of thermal practices and facilities. For the next 30 years “Spa treatments were



incorporated into the national health services of countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and Denmark, and activities at most European spas became almost exclusively medical in nature” (Boekstein, 2014: 3). Portugal was no exception, and the medicalisation of thermal waters “enabled (...) the longer survival of the old spa economy: the social security reimbursement of medically prescribed water cures.” (Bastos, 2011: 41-42)

By the mid-1980s Thermalism was synonymous of the ‘Old & Sick’ taking waters in outdated facilities that reeked of sulphur and disease. Again the alliance between Tourism & contemporary practices imposed structural renovations and the offering of new treatments in hotel units and thermal parks, with the 1990s promoting the term ‘SPA’ (*Sanum per Aqua*) as synonym of refinement. It was a partial recovery of the Roman philosophy in the word, in the then main niche market (Business tourists), with the addition of cosmetics and massages for pure pleasure. One witnessed the “slow de-medicalisation of the spa and its re-invention as SPA” (*Idem*, 2011: 48). The word now emanated scent not stench, it freed itself from State-sponsorship and medical prescription, and was embedded with a Self-awareness of One’s health trinity combining Body-Soul-Mind in a holistic manner dubbed as Well-Being or Wellness. The following quotation reveals this shift:

The new SPA does not really require the existence of thermal water, and sometimes there is no need of water other than to wash the body after coating it with extravagant products such as chocolate, grapes, coffee beans, lotions, oils, all amidst fancy massages, warm stones, crystal therapies, walks in the woods, meditation, mountain biking, gourmet food sampling and aromatherapy.” (*Idem*, 2011: 49)

In 2004 a new law was defined (*Decreto-lei nº142/2004 de 11 de Junho*) and a Technical Evaluation Commission (*Comissão de Avaliação Técnica*) encompassing experts of disparate entities in charge of analysing waters and surveiling practices was formed (Cantista, 2008/2010). The recent conceptual vision allows old thermalism and updated principles to co-exist; as one reads:

The main demand factors that influence the development of wellness tourism and wellness services are concerned with the aging of the European population, and increasing desire to live longer and better, growing awareness of the world health threats, and an increased search for new and different leisure experiences. (Smith & Puzekó qtd in Costa, Quintela, & Mendes, 2015: 23)

21<sup>st</sup>-century Lisbon is in tune with the global trends in Health-Wellness-Tourism as the national plans for the latter have revealed. Indeed, “today health and wellness spa tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of world tourism” (Erfurt-Cooper, 2010: 2). In 1948 the WHO defined Health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (qtd in Huang & Xu, 2014: 494). Scholars like Saracci criticise that it is the definition of ‘Happiness’ and not of ‘Health’ (qtd in Smith & Kelly, 2006: 1), while other authors perceive health tourism as an umbrella that encompasses medical and wellness tourism. The former implies travels to treat illness; the latter focuses on an individual decision for Self well-being. (Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011)

Bearing holistic concerns the Wellness concept was coined by Halbert Dunn in 1959, but it soon evolved acquiring a pinch of Self-responsability, a twist of spirituality, and a dash of environmental sensitivity and emotional dimension (qtd in Huang & Xu, 2014).



Some scholars sustain the shift from illness to wellness, or disease to prevention derived from the growing stress-related chronic diseases (diabetes, high blood pressure, insomnia) and the western world's awareness of such calamity (Artinovic, Milicevi, & Zivanovic, 2012), hence the interest on eastern philosophies like yoga, meditation, (Thai, Ayurvedic) massages, and other Zen-like practices (Smith & Puckzó, 2010). Mueller & Kaufmann refer destinations must now provide lodging units specialised in Wellness as vital attractions to the current demand and the resorts' sustainability (qtd in Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz, 2014), while others claim "Tourism based on health and wellness spa facilities is not one-dimensional, passive or unsophisticated", since it implies a synergy of concepts like sustainability, Self-improvement, communal appreciation, health awareness, and active learning; all in all, a holistic perception of reality (Costa, Quintela, & Mendes, 2015: 22). This plural articulation with a sense of continuous practice turns wellness theory into a lifestyle. As one may joke and conclude "Wellness is a journey, not a destination!" (Smith & Kelly, 2006: 4)

### Estoril's Thermal Identity

A century ago a study stated the existence of "three sources of chloride of sodium or common salt waters at Estoril" (Dalgado, 1910: 5): one near Poça beach and the other two in the valley (near the Franciscan convent and by the foothill of Upper Estoril). With no Roman vestiges and only a legend on a dying horse's regained vitality to sustain its timeless local appreciation (Colaço & Archer, 1999), historic records start in 1527 with the Franciscans settling in, with the 1726 aforementioned scientific study, and the 1775 and 1776 visits of King Joseph I as a patient, which by 1788 led to the building of more bathing rooms for patients and houses to let. The 19<sup>th</sup> century's continuous medical reports on the Estoril springs' properties and benefits (those by the foothill) recall hydrologists, physicians and chemists like Vandelli (1819), José Correia (1835), Tedeschi (1844), Agostinho Lourenço (1866), among others (Pinto & Mangorrinha, 2014). By 1894 landowner José Viana da Silva Carvalho invested on a glasshouse-like thermal venue, since more attendants sought it from May to mid-November.

The water was then classified as "clear, transparent, inodour, saline to taste and slightly unctuous to the touch", whose main mineral ingredients were sodium, calcium, magnesium and potassium (Dalgado, 1910: 8). In April 1894 Mr. Viana won the Estoril waters' concession and Doctor Costa Freire defended its internal use through drinking, gargling, showering, inhalation or application of enemas; externally, baths or showers were recommended. These waters were indicated against pathologies of the digestive, urinary and circulatory tracts, besides promoting metabolism, fighting skin and gynaecological afflictions, and rheumatism. In 1939 a booklet by its then directors (Raposo de Magalhães and Matos Taquenho) compared Estoril's to Bad-Nanheim (Germany) and Royat (France), while newspaper advertisements indicated Baden-Baden (Germany), Montecatini (Italy), Bourbon L'Archambault and Châtel Guyon (France). (Anjos, 2012)

The rise of modern Tourism, a new scientific approach to health and Portugal's new regime (Republic) explain why innovative projects like Fausto Figueiredo's dream of future Estoril was promptly accepted: it suggested a world-class seaside resorts whose



microclimate and spas would be enhanced by modern hotels, casino, park, besides complementary leisure facilities. A trained pharmacist and a travelled businessman Mr. Figueiredo embarked on a life-long mission to acquire local estates, dream, plan, build, promote and renovate Portugal's 1<sup>st</sup> international resort built a-new over a vast coastal pinewood (Carvalho, 2016b). Designed by Silva Júnior, its tourist demand justified the precocious thermal venue's inauguration in August 1918, when it was still being erected. It encompassed updated sections with pump room (*buvette*), rooms for physical therapy, gymnastics and mecanotherapy sessions, besides pool and party salon (Pinto & Mangorrinha, 2014). A decade later it offered beauty services like barber shop, manicure and hairdresser. (Anjos, 2012)

The 1929-1931 completion of Estoril's main attractions (Golf course, Palace Hotel, and Casino) and the arrival of a *Sud-Express* carriage linking Paris-Estoril ensured the resort's success, a fact also reinforced by the State study *Le Portugal Hydrologique et Climatique*. The local spas and natural appeals were thus described:

Rien n'y manque en vue d'une bonne cure thermale; piscines, salles d'hydrothérapie et agents physiques (...). Le climat maritime tempéré et le rayonnement solaire, de cette région privilégiée, contribuent largement à l'efficacité du traitement thermal d'Estoril. (Direction Générale, 1930-1931: 166)

As stated above by the 1930s the outdoors, the beach and the sunlight gained ground over thermal baths. When in 1958 Figueiredo's heirs lost the Gambling concession and engaged on a 10-year long legal battle, the social shift towards sunlight and new management decisions demolished the outdated and little-attended thermal venue in 1961.

The 1960s witnessed the affirmation of the 'Sun Empire' with the Mediterranean and Algarvian resorts taking over, while the 1970s were a decade of turmoil (the oil crisis, the Carnations Revolution, the intense rural and colonial exodus). The world-vision on health and tourism faced continuous transmutation after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, and the destination Estoril endured what Butler classified as a stage of decadence (Carvalho, 2015). By 1978 Licínio Cunha, then director of the Sunny Coast Tourism Commission (*Junta de Turismo da Costa do Sol*) settled in Estoril and a defender of the resort's thermal revival, conducted the Opening Speech for the 1<sup>st</sup> *Jornadas do Termalismo Português*, a meeting where he stressed Estoril's natural/health assets as unique in Europe and yet so un-appreciated. As Cunha sustained "poucas estâncias termais europeias oferecem condições idênticas às do Estoril e o seu desaproveitamento representa uma perda, dificilmente avaliável, mas que é, certamente, importante no domínio da saúde e do turismo" (*Jornadas*, 1978: 13). Thermalism was also a key sector in Portugal's 1<sup>st</sup> National Tourism Plan (*Plano Nacional de Turismo*) designed by Cunha after governmental request and aligned with the country's post-dictatorial re-invention in the mid-1980s.

By 2001 Sancho Silva, then director of the Portuguese Tourism Agency (*Direcção-geral de Turismo*), detached Estoril was completing its recovery cycle as a destination, naming the recent tourist resources accomplished and projects on the rise, which included the erection of a modern thermal venue (*Comunicações*, 2001: 34-35). Indeed, between 1998 and 2000 architect Gil da Graça was in charge of a new complex, while the exploring company ordered the drilling to locate the springs (200m deep) running at 34°C and the analysis that proved its timeless properties had not changed (Pinto & Mangorrinha, 2014). By September 2001 a magazine described the building presented





by *Estoril-Plage S.A.* (owner of the Palace Hotel, Estoril's Golf course and Cascais Marina), listing its waters' application in the treatment of skin, muscular, respiratory, bone, immunity and digestive nuisances (Costa, 2001). As for the services, the four-floored structure was to have two levels devoted to spa treatments and the other two to therapy: the clients' seduction was complemented by the proximity to *Estoril-Plage's* accommodation and leisure facilities. Speaking of treatments they were to range from hydro massage sessions to Vichy baths, preventive and healing properties in the bone, respiratory, skin and aesthetic fields, mainly to serve Greater Lisbon's (upscale) lodging units' guests and residents, with special focus on the Estoril-Cascais axis' main tourist markets (Spain and the UK). (Terma do Estoril, 2007)

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In October 2009 the conclusion of the works were reported on the 25<sup>th</sup> September, which marked a new stage of operational tests and the visit of the then Cascais' Mayor (António Capucho). Readers were also informed that *Terma do Estoril S.A.* was a society whose shareholders were *Estoril-Plage S.A.* and *Opway Imobiliária* (Estoril Reabre, 2009). The two invested an astounding sum of c.€25 million to create, not only Greater Lisbon's sole thermal complex, but also a world-class Wellness Centre of contemporary lines and environmental/sustainable concerns and materials, much like current early-21<sup>st</sup> century clients demand and destinations must comply.

### Results

After the interview with the Wellness Centre's managers one starts by clearing details. Although the State conceded a thermal concession on the Estoril Water and the building retains the aim of offering thermal and wellness services, only the latter is being provided. Why so? Mr. Simões Coelho referred that after being chemically tested the source revealed the precious liquid retains its properties, but the soil occupation over the years (urban pressure) and the abundance of drills (for foundations, sewers, swimming pools and so on) explain the settlement of filters to lead the water from the spring to the surface. Unlike what happens elsewhere like in Germany where filters are accepted to preserve the spring's authenticity, the Portuguese law is still two steps behind it, defending thermal water must be directly channelled from source to surface. Once the national law is updated according to the newest standards, Estoril's venue shall be (as it already is) at the forefront of the practice in national terms, since it already resorts to filters to daily fill its swimming pool with Estoril's salty waters. Therefore, for the time being only the Wellness approach is being offered, and the c.500 associates that every month attend the facilities (numbers reinforced by the Palace Hotel's guests' visits) prove the bet has been a safe one.

The offer is set in two areas, Health & Leisure, with services ranging from the Banyan Tree massages, acupuncture, physical therapy, hydrotherapy, and nutrition appointments, to the Beauty & Cosmetic treatments, besides a gymnasium, an organic caffè, among others. The managers revealed the venue's location explains the plural nationalities of the associates, and the services offered justify the age dispersion of attendants (young adults favour the gym, while seasoned clients in their early 80s prefer hydrotherapy). The complex has been very-well accepted by residents and tourists, which is why attendance has been growing since its inauguration on the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2010. Besides individual applications, partnerships with health insurance companies (such as AdvanceCare and Multicare) and other health associations were forged. The connection with Palace Hotel is also vital: when in August residents leave for their summer



vacation, guests compensate the absence by enjoying the wellness services included in the packages purchased.

As for the staff there are c.40 employees from Portuguese to the Thai therapists available at the Banyan Tree section (the latter were trained in the Group's academy in Phuket). The world converges to Estoril's Wellness Centre in terms of associates, individual clients, hotel guests, and staff, besides reference to the choice of cosmetics applied (the partnership sealed with Sotis, a reputed French laboratory). On the other hand, being Palace Hotel a 5-star unit easily identified with the resort since 1930, the renowned Banyan Tree Group (luxury hotels and resorts) was the perfect match considering its credits firmed across Indian and Pacific oceans, and now expanding westwards.

As for languages, Portuguese, English, French, German and Russian prevail. On the latter Mr. Abrantes stated those tourists tend to arrive in larger groups because of the Palace Hotel's packages. Both managers shared stories on the clients' satisfaction. Besides approval on the venue's pleasant, ethereal atmosphere (of wide, bright areas with updated equipments of all sorts, like the locker rooms), customers feel welcome and pampered on an individual basis (everyone knows everyone's name, as the author noted it while waiting at the reception for the interview to occur), so the word-of-mouth process has been firming this equipment's reputation. The therapeutic dimensions of Estoril's waters also please the clients who admit to feel improvements in terms of (bone and muscular) agility, besides a general state of well-being.

Concerning promotion, to the word-of-mouth process, the outdoors in the venue's vicinity, the Internet sites of Hotel ([www.palacioestorilhotel.com/pt](http://www.palacioestorilhotel.com/pt)) and Centre ([www.estorilwellnesscenter.pt](http://www.estorilwellnesscenter.pt) or [www.banyantreespa.com/outlet.php?oid=29](http://www.banyantreespa.com/outlet.php?oid=29)) one adds the partnerships with health companies, the packages sold by Tour Operators (combining accommodation, wellness, sports *et al*), and the Media coverage especially abroad. Mr. Abrantes recalled some guests revealed having read the *Condé Nast Johansens Luxury Spas 2016* guide and coming across the *Palácio Estoril Hotel, Spa & Golf*, whose upscale offer includes lodging, Estoril's Golf Course, Cascais Marina and Wellness Centre. The physical bond between hotel and centre is such that guests might move around through a tunnel wearing nothing but slippers and bath robe.

What about the future? Mr. Simões Coelho defends a sustainable growth in numbers and human traits. On the one hand, the Director of Operations spoke of a new anti-aging and anti-stress programme to be sold in London that was planned with the assistance of Doctor Manuel Pinto Coelho, a published specialist on the matter. On the other, Doctor Patrícia Segadães is the nutritionist working with the hotel's *Maitre* on the creation of an alternative menu for guests attending the restaurant and the wellness services, in order to ensure greater success to the clinical programmes. The only variable the managers can not control is Nature, so until the thermal law remains unchanged, Estoril's thermal offer remains suspended.

The growing success of Estoril's Wellness services can be statistically grasped when consulting a report of Portugal's Thermal Springs' Association (*Associação das Termas de Portugal*) for the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester of 2016. Comparing the same period of previous and current years (**Table 1**), Estoril's Wellness clients grew 43,55% from 124 in 2015 to 178 in 2016. Financially, it represented a 44,44% revenue increase from €8.243,86 to €11.907,73 (ATP, 2016). And 2016 was just beginning.



The 2015 inquiry on the satisfaction of the tourists visiting Cascais' municipality shared by the *Associação de Turismo de Cascais* (**Table 2**) revealed 63.7% were men, with ages between 35-44 (27.4%) and 45-54 (34.9%), and with a graduate degree (87.7%). The main motivations for travelling were leisure (63.1%) and business (31.1%), arriving by plane (91%), and staying for an average of 4.91 days, and spending on average €1.343,06 (including transportation). Information retrieved prior to the journey indicates hotel websites (66.8%), family & friends (56.6%) and websites offering travel opportunities (54.2%) as the main sources consulted. On the activities best enjoyed going out to dinner (85.6%), visiting museums/monuments (67.4%) and strolling around (61.9%) are the favourite, on areas such as Cascais' downtown (65.6%), Bay (60.2%) and Marina (57%). In terms of expectations, 45.1% claimed the destination confirmed them, while 46.1% admitted it surpassed them, which is why 60.5% wish to return. On a scale of satisfaction 76.3% of the tourists chose the top interval between 8 and 10 points (ATC, 2015, p.4).

Of the main nationalities lodged at local hotels in 2015 (**Table 3**), the Top 5 included Portuguese (223.965), British (130.360), Spanish (111.625), French (103.264), and German (78.845) guests. From January to May 2016 a total of 89.574 Portuguese and 296.135 Foreigners were already accounted for, with Scandinavians beating the British (38.191 to 37.693) mostly because Swedish, Danish, Finnish and Norwegians enjoy golfing in Estoril's soft winter. (Statistics provided by ATC)

### Discussion

“In general, destination attractiveness has been largely defined as the perceived ability of the destination to deliver individual benefits and satisfy potential tourists.” (Hu & Ritchie qtd in Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz, 2013: 521).

After the interviews conducted and the figures analysed one perceives the bet on Wellness to revitalise former Estoril Coast's offer is won, yet there is room for growth and improvement in the fields of promotion, partnerships between stakeholders, but also between local and regional tourist authorities. The 2015 inquiry reveals a concentration of attractions in Cascais, while neighbouring Estoril is mostly chosen as a 'satellite-town' due to its lodging units, since it retains no museum on its timeless tourist importance (except for a small space on the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War exiles), let alone a tourism office (recently closed). This article's author even longs for a museum on Tourism in Estoril, as well.

In 2008 powerplay obliterated the Estoril Coast Tourism Authority on Lisbon's behalf, in the same year when the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the Green Fest occurred in Estoril's Congress Centre (2016 witnessed its 9<sup>th</sup> edition) (<http://www.greenfest.pt/greenfest/>). In 2014 Cascais municipality was included in the list of the *100 Greenest Holiday Destinations* in the world (Carvalho, 2015) and surely venues like Estoril's Congress and Wellness centres built on sustainable materials and holistic practices contributed to the honour. More recently, Palace Hotel's insertion in the *Condé Nast's* guide as a luxury spa to enjoy in 2016 (on a refined list of 71 world-wide units) reflects Estoril's good practices. Mr. Simões Coelho confided that soon an international campaign shall promote the offer as *Palácio Estoril Wellness Centre*, blending the hotel's firmed identity with the contemporary offer able to overcome competition due to its updated



positioning. Cooperation between Cascais', Estoril's and Lisbon's tourism authorities and stakeholders should prove beneficial for all, since it is the sole Wellness Centre in Greater Lisbon and considering how fashionable Portugal recently became as a destination.

### Conclusion

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This article started with the historic and theoretical approach on thermalism and the latest conceptual developments on Wellness, which Smith & Kelly defend being a journey and not a destination. A presentation of Estoril's thermal identity ensued as a means to assist the reader in grasping the resort's timeless asset and the recent offer channelled in the shape of a pioneering Wellness Centre in Portugal.

Skipping into the tourist reality of the Lisbon-Estoril-Cascais destination, an interview on the Estoril venue's managers was conducted and revealed its growing affirmation in terms of plural offer, strategic positioning, promotional and sustainable concerns (in tangible and intangible features). With the assistance of a 2015 inquiry on the local tourists' satisfaction and statistics on nationalities and hotel sleepovers, and a report on clients and revenues concerning 2016's 1<sup>st</sup> trimester on the Wellness services, one concludes there is room for growth as far as promotion is concerned, especially considering that recently Portugal is being unveiled as one of Europe's best-kept secrets and as a manifold destination (awards bestowed and increasing tourist flows sustain this idea).

In the 2010s Cascais has been conveying the image of a sustainable destination aiming at attracting well-off seasoned visitors who might consider retiring there. The insertion of *Palácio Estoril Hotel, Spa & Golf* in the demanding *Condé Nast Johansens Luxury Spas 2016* guide assists in Estoril's rebirth as Lisbon's only updated health resort and one of Europe's finest, considering its microclimate, seaside location, leisure programmes and man-made assets available. 'Welltality' is the new Hospitality (Guilherme, 2016: 13) and this paper's author defends its importance for hoteliers, stakeholders, promoters, and host community, so they may convince the customer/tourist on the destination's differentiating intangibility. A century over Fausto Figueiredo's plan for a pioneering resort in Portugal, Estoril reveals its inner phoenix by betting on healthy assets to rise above competitors as a distinctive destination. As it was once, so it shall hopefully be again. And may this simple article be complemented by future surveys and propositions that may too assist in the resort's lasting 21<sup>st</sup> century success.

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**Image 1.** 1930s Estoril's delights: Park, Casino, Thermal venue and Hotels<sup>1</sup>



(Author's Copyright)

**Image 2.** The contemporary Wellness Centre



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<sup>1</sup> The Author did not indicate where images should be placed in the article, leaving that possibility open to the reviewers'/publishers' aesthetic decision. Original postcard and photographs are part of her collection.



**Image 3.** The Zen-like hosting in the Banyan Tree Spa section



**Image 4.** The swimming pool offering Estoril's salty waters



**Image 5.** Mr. Abrantes showing a medical office (Palace Hotel in the background)





**Table 1.** Attendants of Estoril's Wellness Centre (1<sup>st</sup> trimesters of 2015 & 2016)

2015	2016
124	178

Source: Author inspired by ATP report

**Table 2.** 2015 Inquiry on the Satisfaction of Tourists visiting Cascais (main data)

Men	63.7%
35-44 Years Old	27.4%
45-54 Years Old	34.9%
Graduate degree	87.7%
Main motivation for travelling - Leisure	63.1%
Main motivation for travelling - Business	31.1%
Arrival by Plane	91%
Average Stay	4.91 days
Average spending (including transportation)	€1.343,06
Information - Hotel websites	66.8%
Information - Family & Friends	56.6%
Information - websites offering travel opportunities	54.2%
Activities best enjoyed - going out to dinner	85.6%
Activities best enjoyed - visiting museums/monuments	67.4%
Activities best enjoyed - strolling around	61.9%
Favourite areas - Cascais' downtown	65.6%
Favourite areas - Cascais' Bay	60.2%
Favourite areas - Cascais' Marina	57%
Expectations - confirmed	45.1%
Expectations - surpassed	46.1%
Wish to return	60.5%
Scale of satisfaction	76.3%

Source: Author inspired by ATC report

**Table 3.** Top 5 nationalities lodged in Cascais' hotels in 2015

	2015
Portuguese	223.965
British	130.360
Spanish	111.625
French	103.264
German	78.845

Source: Author inspired by ATC Statistics