

## Where Are We All Going?

By Judy Chapman

**Eco Chic. Sustainable Travel. Organic Luxury. While the age of consumption is reportedly slowing down, the luxury travel market is blossoming at an incredible rate. According to a recent survey conducted in the US, even the most affluent consumers are swapping their Prada bags for life-changing experiences – and this is where spas and retreats may lead the way.**

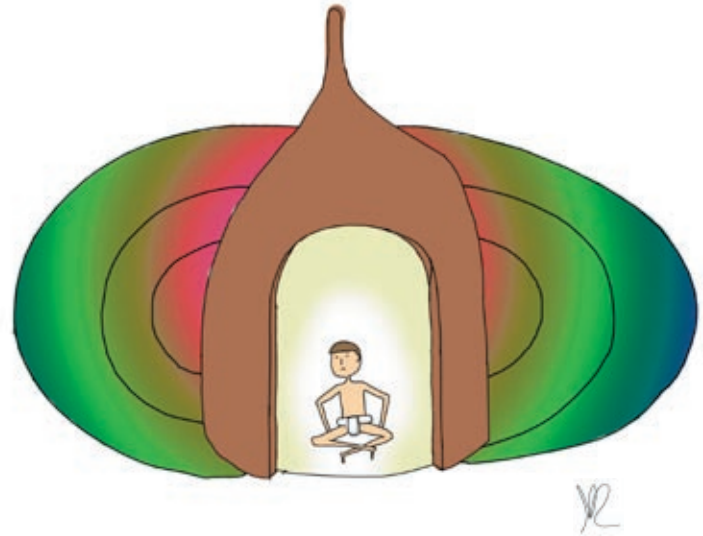
**M**y sister has never understood my obsession with spa. A renowned yoga teacher and massage therapist, her definition of healing has nothing to do with beautiful surrounds, spa menus or treatments created for the mass market. When she accompanied me to a spa conference last year, she was amazed to witness how fast healing solutions were being wrapped up in products, treatments, books and teas and sold off to the people.

We have been living in what Dr Clive Hamilton of The Australian Institute calls 'affluenza', which can be described as an epidemic of unthinking consumerism and an unsustainable addiction to economic growth. But now this is about to change.

According to a recent survey by Unity Marketing ([unitymarketingonline.com](http://unitymarketingonline.com)) in the US, spending trends are a' changing. Affluent consumers are moving away from purchasing luxury goods and are spending their dollars on life-changing experiences.

"There is a definite turn away from material desires towards more emotional experiences," reports Pam Danziger, president of Unity Marketing and author of *Let Them Eat Cake: Marketing Luxury to the Masses*. "Affluent people want enriching experiences that will make a difference." The report revealed that the number-one reason for consumers to take vacations is stress relief and relaxation; people want special experiences that make memories.

"Meaning is the new money," says Mark Wuttke, principle of the Wuttke Group, who will be speaking at the next Spa Industry Seminar in September ([turningpoint.com.sg](http://turningpoint.com.sg)). "We are yearning for more purpose in our lives and are effectively giving up to go up, by exchanging quantity for quality and success for significance." Mark thinks that this trend is driven primarily by baby boomers as they move deeper into the second half of their lives. He believes



that experiences of the future will not be determined by salary, race, religion or politics, but rather that space and time will be the real currency of this century.

What some dismiss as fluff and pampering, others hail as the future of healing and medicine. Globally, a recent report released by Luxury Alliance entitled 'The direction of Luxury', revealed that even though economies rise and fall, the luxury travel market is robust if not growing at a remarkable pace, and the wellness factor is a major component of this. Predictions stated in the report include an increase in on-site physical check ups, more diversity in styles of spas and retreats and an increase in spas' size.

There is no question that we are shaping up to become the ultimate culture of health of all time. But during this fast growth period we must also be wary of slipping into a consumer trance where we are too easily influenced by what others claim wellness is all about.

Carroll Dunham, an Anthropologist living in Nepal (and also part of the expert team behind CHI Spas), says it is time for the industry to now back up what they are claiming, particularly when it comes to treatments and ingredients.

"The spa industry is in its infancy, and as an anthropologist, I have great respect for oral traditions – especially female body care traditions and Grandma's kitchen recipes. But if we want to progress, we need to examine closely the claims we make and we need to discern good science protocols from poor science."

I'm as guilty as the next when it comes to promoting how treatments and products can heal the mind, body and spirit. Perhaps it's time to take a pause. Having said that, my sister recently added daily visits to spas as part of her yoga retreats. It seems the spa movement has infiltrated even the toughest critics. 