

Ancient techniques, *future wellbeing*

Dive into the holistic journey of recovery
at Zulal Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som



Wellness is becoming an increasingly core focus for hotels around the world. Particularly in the Middle East, the design of the spa has evolved over years, adapting to the behaviours and desires of society in each era. Dating back as far as the Ottoman Empire, hammams were frequented for the cleansing of the body and the spirit. Today, spas are a place of pampering, a place to destress and detoxify in a luxurious and calming setting.

While most spas mainly focus on physical and mental relaxation, Qatar's Zulal Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som has a medical philosophy rooted in holistic wellbeing. With an integration of body, mind and spirit, it aims to treat the root causes of health issues, rather than just addressing symptoms. Offering a medically informed, personalised approach that integrates preventive medicine, medical assessments and lifestyle changes, the resort's approach to wellness is geared to support long-term health.

Hotelier Middle East sat down with GM Ammar Samad as well as Dr Syed Shadab Ahmed, the medical doctor at Zulal Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som, to learn more about the resort's approach to wellbeing. Dr Syed is a leading medical professional in the Middle East with over a decade of experience in primary care and occupational health. At Zulal Wellness Resort, he combines clinical expertise with a holistic approach, focusing on personalised care, diagnostic precision and empowering guests to take control of their wellbeing.

A shift in guest demands

Since the pandemic, as Dr Syed recognises there has been a notable shift towards addressing mental health concerns, such as anxiety and stress, alongside physical health. He noticed that Zulal's guests are increasingly seeking holistic wellness approaches that not only enhance physical fitness but also focus on emotional resilience, immunity boosting and stress management. There is also greater demand for personalised health solutions, as people are more focused on long-term wellbeing.

"Integrative and preventive medicine is becoming an essential aspect of luxury hospitality. They want programmes that integrate medical knowledge with wellness practices to prevent illness, enhance vitality, and promote overall life satisfaction. This trend is likely to grow as people become more health-conscious and proactive about their well-being," explains Dr Syed.

With over 20 years in luxury hotel management, GM Samad brings deep operational knowledge and a personal passion for wellness to Zulal. He has also observed how wellness travel is shifting from short-term relaxation to long-term, personalised transformation. "Guests now prioritise emotional wellbeing, stress management, and



preventive health," Samad says. "We've refined our programs to meet these needs, focusing on resilience, immunity and better sleep."

Harnessing ancient techniques for modern treatments

Wellness at Zulal isn't just a service, it's a lived culture. To create its signature holistic and personalised wellness experience, Zulal integrates both contemporary and traditional approaches. Specifically, it combines the ancient wisdom of Arabic and Islamic Medicine (TAIM), herbal remedies, energy healing and mindfulness practices, with modern treatments based on evidence-based science, like medical assessments, fitness routines and stress management practices.

Its holistic therapies stemming from ancient healing practices include Indian Ayurveda and Tibetan sound healing. The vibrations of the sounds penetrate the body, inducing deep



relation which helps to restore balance to the body's energy centres. Shirodhara is another Ayurvedic therapy, which consists of pouring of warm sesame oil onto the 'third eye' in the centre of the forehead. Scientifically, this point is above the pineal gland. Historically, the point is thought to be the bridge between the physical and spiritual realms.

Through these various treatments offered, guests are able to experience a meaningful cultural connection and a deeper sense of place during their wellness journey at the resort. To ensure the spa staff's service is authentic to these practices and aligns with Zulal's philosophy, they undergo regular training and wellness check-ins. "Our onboarding covers TAIM, service philosophy and guest journey support, with ongoing development in therapies, communication and emotional care, ensuring we grow as both professionals and individuals," explains Samad.

The hotel's health practitioners come from all over the world, bringing a range of skills and knowledge such as naturopathic medicine and chakra healing.

"We prioritise kindness, attentiveness and teamwork, ensuring that positive energy flows naturally to our guest experience," he adds. "For me, wellbeing is balance, staying grounded and caring for mind, body, and spirit. I aim to lead by example, knowing that aligned leadership sets the tone for the entire team."

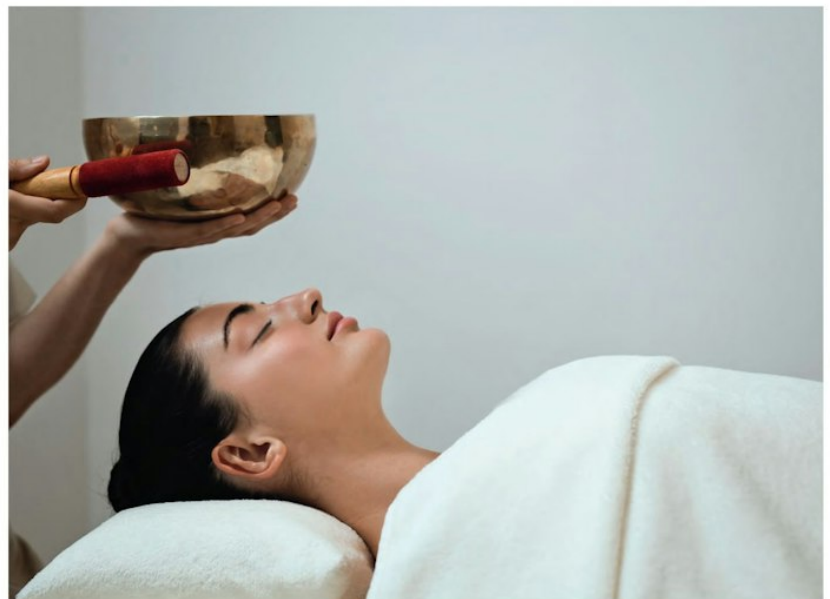
How to deliver a transformative wellness experience

Dr Syed believes that integrative and preventive medicine is becoming an essential aspect of luxury hospitality. "Guests are increasingly looking for holistic, personalised approaches to health that go beyond typical spa treatments. They want programmes that integrate medical knowledge with wellness practices to prevent illness, enhance vitality, and promote overall life satisfaction. This trend is likely to grow as people become more health-conscious and proactive about their well-being," he explains.

Health and wellness is different from person to person. To provide a truly personalised experience that caters to the needs of each individual, the wellness team carries out detailed consultations that help them understand guest's unique health concerns, lifestyle and goals. Using this, a personalised wellness retreat is designed to address both guests' physical and emotional needs. Programs often include a combination of medical treatments, fitness regimens, emotional support through therapies and nutrition therapy, all aimed at achieving balance and overall health.

"Preventive medicine is a key focus, as we work to identify health risks early and create tailored retreats to prevent illness and promote lasting wellness. The result is a balanced program that nurtures the body, mind, and spirit, providing our guests with lasting wellbeing and a deeper connection to their own health," shares Dr Syed.

Mental wellness is another integral part of Zulal's health strategy. The resort offers therapies like meditation,



mindfulness, energy balancing and sound healing to support emotional wellbeing. Dr Syed says: "Our retreats emphasise reducing stress, improving emotional resilience and creating a peaceful mental state, which complements physical health and contributes to overall well-being."

"One guest arrived utterly burnt out and left smiling, saying it was the first time in years she felt like herself. These transformations remind us why our work truly matters," adds Samad.

Looking to the future, Dr Syed recognises that advanced nutrition treatments are becoming popular. As a result, the resort is incorporating advanced diagnostic tools like genomics testing, food intolerance testing and indirect calorimeter testing, to explore the link between the guest's response to different foods and their genes. With this in-depth knowledge, they can create completely personalised treatment schedules and target-based meal plans, with therapies like cryotherapy. He reveals that they are also exploring digital wellness solutions that allow guests to track their progress remotely, making wellness more accessible even after they leave the resort.