

FOUR SEASONS' CHRISTELLE BESNIER ON WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE SPA DIRECTOR AND A GREAT GUEST EXPERIENCE



Four Seasons' Senior Spa Director, Middle East and Africa, Christelle Besnier, talks about her spas and the habits of effective spa directors.

Christelle Besnier is the Senior Spa Director, Middle East and Africa, for [Four Seasons](#) Hotels. With a passion for setting the standard across Abu Dhabi and Dubai for wellness, Ms. Besnier's goal is "to perfect the entire guest experience from end to end."

Her career started with a specialized tourism agency in Cannes, through which she was introduced to hospitality at the Hotel Metropole where she moved to work in sales and marketing and moved up the ranks through the executive office, working on special projects and guest relations. Ms. Besnier says, "When the project of the spa came along, with ESPA at that time, I wanted to be a part of it. I didn't even know what 'spa' was and I was very excited about it. So, I worked on the pre-opening of the Metropole Spa, Monte Carlo."

She then opened the Guerlain spa at Hotel du Palais in Biarritz and worked as an international trainer for Caudalie Cosmetics before returning to the hospitality industry ("I missed hospitality and being a part of a team," she says), taking on the roles of Assistant Manager, then Spa Manager, and finally Spa Director at the Hotel George V in Paris. She later left to open the spa at the Four Seasons Abu Dhabi, moving her family and twin girls with her.

Ms. Besnier is now in Dubai overseeing a collection of three spas in the United Arab Emirates: the Pearl Spa

and Wellness Jumeirah, The Pearl Spa and Wellness DIFC, and the [Pearl Spa and Wellness Abu Dhabi](#), while also doing regional duties overlooking all Saudi and Beirut projects.

We connected with Christelle Besnier to talk about Four Seasons spas in the Middle East and what makes a great guest experience and effective spa director.

Can you talk about the three spas you oversee for Four Seasons in the UAE?

They are amazing. With this collection, we are celebrating the identity of each spa. So, Abu Dhabi, which I consider my baby, because I opened it, is a city hotel. It's a two-floor spa with eight treatment rooms, a beautiful relaxation area, wet facilities, and a big fitness center. That spa is more traditional. You feel the culture of the Middle East.

We have signature oils with special scents that are blended and sourced locally. In Abu Dhabi, we have za'atar, white fig, and white tea. It's very warm. You really feel the Middle East when you have your massage. In DIFC we have myrrh and black tea, so it's very warming as well, amazing for the muscle tension, and it represents the bustle of Dubai because that spa is nestled inside DIFC, so it's full of business traffic, and when you come to the spa, you have an amazing feeling of relaxation. That spa is very small, with only five treatment rooms, no steam room, no sauna, but there is access to an outdoor glass pool and jacuzzi that overlook the Dubai skyline.

The resort at Jumeirah is bigger, with 10 treatment rooms, including a double couples suite, an indoor pool, relaxation rooms, outdoor area, fitness center, and tennis court. The signature oil there is more resort-y. We are surrounded by beautiful frangipani, so our scent is frangipani, lavender, and neroli, promoting relaxation and disconnection.

The brand's mantra is centered in wellness that connects, balances and inspires fulfillment and self-love. The spas all offer signature treatments and rituals that are common between them and a range of experiences that are unique to each location.

What makes a great guest experience?

The great guest experience for us is to be understood. It starts with the reservation team being on hand to fill the needs of the guest, flowing down through the spa professionals to take note of their needs and requests. We have a lot of regular guests that we know well. We know their preferences and can anticipate their needs, their preferred therapist, treatment, techniques, the setup of the room. Obviously we need to go the extra mile to satisfy the guests. Whenever there is an opportunity for us to pay extra attention and do something that they are not expecting and that makes sense for their experience, we encourage the team to do so. It can be a farewell gift, a little card in the treatment room, a healthy beverage to celebrate a special occasion. We have many stories like this.

What are some habits of effective spa directors or leaders in spa and wellness?

An effective leader in spa and wellness should be a listener and multitasker. These would be the two main words I would use. Spa professionals are not in the same culture as F&B or room professionals. You need to have extra attention and extra care and be able to understand people even when they're not talking. Leaders need to listen to their teams and be role models. I'm a very



hands-on spa director. I think it's important that the team be inspired by your actions

And multitasking, because being a spa director is doing everything. I'm doing finance, I'm hiring, I'm doing marketing, I'm doing guest relations, purchasing, negotiating with suppliers... I have to be creative because I'm looking for new ways to build new products and new treatments. The days are not long enough but I love it.

What's your favorite thing about your job?

I think you feel the passion when I'm talking about it, and I think my favorite thing is when I see and hear amazing feedback from the team or from a guest. And then I am sharing that with the team. And when I see the pride in their eyes and their smile, I'm happy because it's teamwork. To see the team super proud of themselves makes me very happy. This is what I missed when I left hospitality, and this is why I am still here so many years after.

What are you excited about?


I'm excited about Four Seasons because we have a new VP of wellness, Michael Newcombe. And also because post Covid, we see that wellness is so recognizable everywhere, like wellness at work. Everyone wants to start their fitness goals again. The development of wellness programs is to me quite important. I hope to see a new reality after Covid that some behaviors will change. I am really looking forward to seeing how the near future will translate wellness and how we will be the artisans of wellbeing and living well.

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