

spa interview

riana RIEGO GLOBALspavanatge

writer **Tiffany Laue**

In 1995, Riana Riego found herself involved in the management of the spa at the Four Seasons Maui and completely fell in love with the industry. Since then she hasn't looked back. Now having just set up her own spa consultancy business, Global SpaVantage in the US, Riana looks back at a 15-year career and discusses the constantly changing nature of the spa industry.

looking back on the beginning of her spa career, Riana Riego acknowledges that a lot of it was all by chance. "In 1995, a friend wanted to lease the day spa at the Four Seasons Maui and asked me to consult and assist him. With my background in public relations, I had more experience with resorts that he did. Soon I was setting up and managing his entire operation." She followed that spa experience with a move to California in 2003 which saw her open her first resort spa at the Renaissance Esmeralda in Indian Wells. She also maintained a continuous relationship with Marriott International and KSL resorts.

Prior to her life in the world of spa, Riana had a hand in almost everything. From public relations with Hilton International in her hometown of Manila, she moved to New Jersey where she worked in real estate and property management, followed by an exciting but short stint on Wall Street. Her decision to go into consulting after 15 years in the spa industry was in her opinion, a natural progression. "Transitioning was natural – not difficult – it was basically a change of pace and mindset not to physically go into an office. The independence from a corporate formula and structure takes discipline to set your own schedule, and maintain a balanced separation of work and home life."

As part of being her own boss, Riana describes the main difficulty of the job as "riding the peaks and valleys." She goes on to say, "It's very much like constantly applying for a job and sometimes all the

"In Asian history, there is a culture of spa that has transcended time and been kept alive through generational carryover."

offers come in at once. You need to know how to juggle all the balls in the air – with the same resilience and attention that you would give a single project. The bustle of activity can suddenly slow down and that's when you learn how to relax, regroup and refresh your batteries." Her work with different clients spans from creating finance systems to wellness programmes, as well as working with young spa leaders and professionals in developing their business.

Having grown up in the Philippines, the US-based consultant finds her cultural

roots a true inspiration for her business. "I have the dual capacity of having worked in the American spa industry for the past decade, as well as having grown up in an Asian society where wellness is a big part of everyday life," she says. "In Asia, wellness is generally a part of the culture and has been passed down from generations. The only thing that is new is the corporate involvement. In the US, spa has historically been experienced through privilege and is more of a 'learned' attribute to lifestyle."

At the same time, she firmly believes that the spa industry is without a doubt a most interesting place to be in now. "The industry is such a fluid and organic entity," she says. "Nothing ever stays the same, and the constant challenge of keeping up with it, and improving on it, keeps me busy and fulfilled." She cites both customisation of spa treatments as well as differentiation of spas as two of the key trends for the future.

Overall, Riana remains impressed with the evolving nature of the spa and firmly believes it does so in order to discover new states of wellness for spa visitors. "In this constantly evolving industry, nothing is set in stone, so the field of creativity and imagination is wide open – which makes for an exciting era."

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