

European Spa

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Intimate Italian luxury at Lefay
Resort & Spa Lago di Garda

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Spread across three levels of naturally terraced, wooded hillside, Lefay Resort & Spa offers stunning views of Lake Garda from each of its 93 suites

Circle of life

High above the glittering waters of Lake Garda, the celebrated **Lefay Resort & Spa** offers award-winning wellness and healing with the finest Italian hospitality

[Report by Sarah Camilleri]

As the leaf-gilded gates glide open, it's difficult not to be impressed by the natural beauty embracing the €50m Lefay Resort & Spa. Perched high above the western shores of Lake Garda, this award-winning spa destination offers breathtaking views of the picturesque town of Gargnano and the lake below. Just one hour and 20 minutes' drive from Verona airport, Lefay remains a world away from the popular tourist spots on the lakeside.

The Leali family's ambitious debut into wellness hospitality has set a benchmark for its development of a collection of luxurious Italian eco-resorts. Since opening in 2008, Lefay has gained a number of notable hospitality and spa accolades. So far in 2015 it has been named Best Destination Spa in the Condé Nast Johansens Spa Awards for Excellence, as well as Resort Spa of the Year 2015 (Western Europe & Scandinavia) in the World Spa & Wellness Awards.

While attracting a growing audience of Italian guests, the resort's reputation also entices international wellness seekers from key markets including Germany, Austria and the UK, as well as the US, Russia and the Middle East. The story of how Lefay earned its wings has an equally international connection by way of aviation. In 1989, its enterprising owners, Alcide Leali and his wife Liliana, successfully launched regional airline Air Dolomiti, with the aim of serving business



"Everything at Lefay has been designed to reflect our commitment to wellness. From the moment you pass through the gates, you can feel it everywhere"

Alcide Leali Jr
Managing director
Lefay Resorts



Clockwise from top: The reception area is a hub through which all guests must pass to reach their suites; treatments can be taken in the Zen Garden gazebo; couples can get back to the elements in a private spa; atmospheric immersion in Lefay's indoor pool; the opulent sauna interior



"We really wanted to create something far beyond the typical wellness offer - a unique concept to deliver health through awareness"

Dr Maurizio Corradin
Medical director
Lefay Resort & Spa

▷ travellers commuting from northern Italy to the rest of Europe. In 2003 they sold their share to Lufthansa and began an ambitious journey to create a unique wellness destination for Italy.

"My grandfather was in steel production, when my father joined the family business. Then, in the late 1980s, he decided to diversify and launched Air Dolomiti," reveals the founder's 31-year-old son, Alcide Leali Jr, who took the reins as managing director of Lefay Resorts in 2012 and today heads up the business.

"This was the time of deregulation of airlines in Europe, so my father's vision to create the first regional airline for Italy and southern Europe was extremely timely," he adds. "After the sale, my parents really wanted to create something new - an entrepreneurial hospitality brand. But there are so many wonderful hotels in Italy, Lefay could not be just another luxury hotel with a nice spa," he smiles.

Natural design

A veritable showcase of smart, sustainable architecture, Lefay certainly stands out from the crowd. Designed by Italian wellness specialist and architect Hugo Demetz, in close collaboration with Liliana Leali, the resort blends unobtrusively into 11 hectares of



naturally terraced, wooded hillside, criss-crossed with walking trails, olive trees and stunning natural gardens.

Set over three meandering levels, Lefay's contemporary façade is inspired by the region's characteristic lemon houses which are used to protect the delicate fruit during the winter months. Carefully chosen sustainable materials and an array of locally sourced finishes, including Italian marble, olive and walnut timber, give Lefay a true sense of place - it's as if this resort has literally grown out of the hillside.

Flat, eco-friendly living roofs and a stunning selection of naturally filtered indoor and outdoor saltwater hydro pools meld into the landscape,



Feeding the soul

A focus on inclusivity and healthy eating is an intrinsic part of the Lefay dining experience, whether guests are selecting from its gourmet menu or following a tailored weight-management programme



perfectly positioned to give bathers stunning views of the lake below. Generous light, airy spaces and a sustainable approach to its design has gained Lefay notable ecological certifications, including ISO 14001, 9001 and 14064, for low carbon emissions.

“The design of our resort is really quite unique as we chose to position the spa at its heart, with all the other facilities fanned out around it,” explains Leali. “In fact, our resort could more accurately be described as a spa with rooms.

“It is quite deliberate that all our guests have to walk through the spa reception to get to their suites. We really wanted to create this sense of connection – a complete wellness experience. Everything at Lefay has been designed to reflect this commitment to wellness. From the moment you pass through our gates, you can feel it – in our service, our cuisine, our suite accommodation – everywhere.”

The resort offers 93 suites, which all enjoy lake views and fan out from the award-winning 3,000sqm spa. Set over two levels and divided into three distinctive areas, Lefay Spa offers guests ample space to roam, relax and enjoy their spa time. The World of Water & Fire area provides an extensive array of thermal experiences, including five types of sauna, the saltwater pool, indoor and outdoor heated

The Lefay Vital Gourmet menu offers a modern take on the traditional Mediterranean diet, relying wherever possible on locally sourced and seasonal produce. Forget fancy *foie gras* and any food sources that involve inhumane or unsustainable methods of production, every delicious morsel served by executive chef Matteo Maenza and his team dovetails with the Lefay wellness vision.

“We take a very careful approach to our suppliers, using a preferred supply chain, which includes local providers as well as those with specific biological and organic certifications for their produce,” confirms Alcide Leali Jr.

“Our two restaurants serve different menus using the same principles and philosophy. La Grande Limonaia is more gourmet and refined, whereas our Trattoria La Vigna provides regionally influenced Italian dishes.”

Lefay offers lighter options on its Spa Menu, created by the medical and chef teams, which anyone staying can sample. “We also offer a personalised menu to guests on the Lefay

Method weight management programme. After their initial consultation with our doctor, our chef will collaborate to put together a menu to reflect their needs,” explains Leali.

A nourishing experience

The Lefay team feel strongly that eating should be an enjoyable part of any stay. “Our guests eat together in the same space, there is no separation for those on a specific diet,” Leali explains. “We want people to learn to live life better as well as find a new way to eat and enjoy their meals without feeling isolated or different from others.”

He is keen to point out that a stay at Lefay is not about losing seven kilos in seven days. “This is an unhealthy and unsustainable approach,” he states. “We focus on the main goal, which is learning to have a positive and healthy approach to eating. Weight is a reflection of behaviour, so this is what we have to teach people to change. We want people to go home with the tools to continue this process.”



Clockwise from left: Daily classes including tai chi can be taken in the resort's gardens; the tranquil view from a suite balcony; Lefay's offering includes a range of its own branded retail products; an Energetic massage is part of Lefay's holistic treatment menu



▷ saltwater pools, an outdoor whirlpool and plenty of relaxation spaces. The Nature & Fitness zone offers an extensive fitness area and gym for daily classes, while the inner sanctum of the spa houses 21 treatment rooms, all with lake views, as well as the medical team's consultation rooms. Finally, the areas of the spa grouped together as 'In Silence and among the Stars: Trilogy in the Air' include the outdoor running circuit and trim trail equipment, as well as a path that connects five meditation areas, each symbolising a different season or stage of life.

The Lefay Method

Most guests check into Lefay for a minimum of two days, but more typical is a seven-day stay encompassing a Discovery, Essence or Integral health programme. Those looking for a deeper level of wellness immersion can opt for the five-day or longer Lefay Method – a supervised programme of treatments devised by medical director Dr Maurizio Corradin, backed by the expertise of Lefay's own Scientific Committee, and skillfully delivered by a 23-strong spa therapy team, headed by spa manager Fabrizio Castellani.

Rooted in the principles of Classical Chinese Medicine (CCM), Lefay's extensive treatment menu offers an intriguing selection of international spa modalities and complementary disciplines, many of which use locally sourced herbs and Lefay's own olive oil, grown in the region.

You will not find Botox or invasive medi-spa services here, but there are face-lifting treatments that use acupuncture and massage, designed to stimulate energy points and reduce the signs of ageing. Guests can tap into a vast range of medically supervised complementary disciplines including naturopathy,



thalassotherapy, acupuncture, moxibustion, osteopathy, physiotherapy and medical check-ups, to evaluate stress and dietary intolerance.

"We really wanted to create something far beyond the typical wellness offer guests might expect – a unique concept that would deliver health through awareness," reveals Dr Corradin, who has practised CCM for over 30 years. "Our lives can be full of responsibilities and we are constantly forced to focus on what occurs around us. The Lefay Method aims to rebalance and centre what is inside us."

While it may be medically supervised, Lefay's menu is totally holistic – a crafted, subtle blend of expertly executed modalities, designed to improve the flow of energy (chi) through a combination of massage,



"The Lefay Method treatments now account for 80% of our treatment revenue. It makes us unique and gives us something different to offer"

Fabrizio Castellani
Spa manager
Lefay Resort & Spa

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- ▷ complementary treatments, exercise classes and outdoor activity, optimised for each individual guest. Depending on their specific goals, guests can select from three general programmes and five specific health programmes delivered by the Method, which focus on different challenges entitled: Weight Management, Beauty of Body & Soul, Posture, Detox, Fitness, Sleep and the newly launched Skin programme.

Creating a vision

According to Leali, the development of the Lefay Method was essential to meet the resort's commitment to excellence. "We could have bought in spa experts or a brand to operate our spa, but this did not fit with our vision to create a sustainable brand. We knew that we needed to create our own spa concept, protocols and products," he states.

However, Lefay also wanted to ensure its offer was rounded and internationally attractive. "For this reason we selected Thalgo to complete our offer and provide more choice for our guests," adds Leali.

Creating a complete offering from scratch was a large scale challenge. "It was not just about conceiving a concept but also devising and delivering all the protocols, all the training for the staff, as well as developing all the spa programmes," says spa manager Fabrizio Castellani. However, the results seem to be gaining their own momentum. "The Lefay Method treatments have actually grown and developed over the years and now account for 80% of our treatment revenue," he asserts. "It makes us unique and gives us something different to offer."

Lefay offers daily classes in a wide range of disciplines, including: personal training, Pilates, tai chi, qi gong, yoga, body sculpt and postural gymnastics.



Clockwise from top left: Soothing tones in the spa's Sunset Relaxation area; a rejuvenating dip in the saltwater pool; the power of nature at the Red Phoenix meditation area; preparations for a private bathing ritual

Ever inventive, the spa team has also developed a range of intriguing signature treatments, such as the Trilogy of Daphne, Apollo and Eros, a romantic couple's ritual, which takes place in Lefay's Private Spa.

The resort also welcomes day spa guests and offers seasonal spa days throughout the year. "We judge this on our capacity," explains Castellani. "We are careful to ensure it is controlled and that we have space for our guests before we open these." Families, too, are welcome. "We have always been a child-friendly property as children are part of life. We have provided great services such as our Kids Club, which offers



Clockwise from below: A Lefay stone therapy treatment; the beautiful surroundings are reflected in the spa's indoor/outdoor pool; al fresco dining at a Royal Suite



▷ programmes, games and space to play. We can take care of the children so that the parents can take time to enjoy themselves and the treatments. We also have dedicated family suites," he adds.

Team commitment

The average length of service of the 120-strong Lefay spa and hospitality teams is five or six years, proving the depth of dedication that runs through the resort. "We have taken a very different approach to our selection of staff compared to many of our contemporaries in luxury hospitality. We recruit for attitude, not experience," states Leali.

"The average age of our staff is very low – this is uncommon in Italy, but service is all about attitude. We have recruited a team with great attitude and then invested in training to develop them. This is not the easy way but it is successful and innovative. We average around 5,000 training hours a year across the team. This means that they are highly motivated and feel part of the success here."

New horizons

The mission to deliver an 'all-encompassing sense of wellness' is coupled by the Leali family's vision to create a truly sustainable resort with a luxurious Italian vibe. "Luxury tourism can also be sustainable and my parents had the foresight to understand this," says Leali. "What we sell here is not just a stay, or a spa treatment or a meal, we sell an emotion. We would like people to leave feeling that they have improved their life, even if it is in the smallest of ways."

Now the resort is firmly on the spa map, Leali and his team are busy preparing to develop the next Lefay destination. "From the beginning we knew that we

wanted to create three distinct locations: lake, country and mountain, within Italy, so we are now working to realise our mountain property in the Dolomites."

"The location of the new resort is still under wraps, but the property will be built from scratch again and will also strongly identify with its location in both architecture and offer," explains Leali. "We have acquired the land and subject to planning permission, we look forward to starting construction at the end of this year and to open in 2017."

The search for the ideal third site also continues in earnest. "We have taken our time to perfect and develop our concept here and this will stand us in good stead for the development of our second and third Lefay Resorts," smiles Leali, before adding: "Good things take time!" ●●●●●

SPA STATISTICS

Lefay Resort & Spa Lago di Garda

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www.lefayresorts.com

Managing director: Alcide Leali

Medical director: Maurizio Corradin

Spa manager: Fabrizio Castellani

Spa team: 23

Spa size: 3,000sqm

Architect/spa designer: Hugo Demetz

Principle contractor: Paterlini Costruzioni

Treatment rooms: 21 plus two private spas

Pool design and installation: Piscine Castiglione

Pools: Heated indoor and outdoor saltwater swimming pools, 25-metre heated training pool, Fonte Roccolino heated whirlpool

Saunas: Aromatic sauna (40-42°), Caligo Sauna (42-45°), Olive Tree Sauna (50-60°), Water & Fire Sauna (75-90°), Lady Sauna (38-42°)

Other: Two relaxation areas with lake view, The Turquoise Grotto with warm water loungers, Sunset Relax, cold water stream, ice fountain

Fitness: Gym with Technogym Wellness System and aerobics studio for Pilates, yoga, tai chi, qi gong

Product houses: Lefay SPA, Thalgo, OPI, Biosthétique, Vitalis, Lumen, Orly, Carthusia

Specialist equipment: Nilo treatment couches and hot towel cabbies