

DESIGN TRANSLATION

There are as many types of wellness hotels as there are, well, camels in the desert, perhaps? At any rate, a caravan seems to have taken a turnoff onto Ellmau. Its legacy? Generous accommodation whose alpine, urban and Middle Eastern elements melded together to form a truly alluring oasis of relaxation.

Our noses are the first to sense the time. The sliding doors barely open before we're embraced by exotic fragrances of incense and spice—a subtle yet distinct aroma of clove, anise, cinnamon and the like. A sweetly scented trail guides us to the reception much like an ancient lingering scent from the legendary spice trade routes. We're first met by turbans. Could it be an illusion? Was the heady incense masking other ingredients? Don't let your mind get the best of you! The head scarves couldn't possibly be Western. It's just wet hair wrapped up in towels. Besides, the mysterious characters aren't sauntering in caftans, they're simply bathrobes. We'll also be able to explore the superb wellness facility. But for now, we're warmly welcomed.

"Those who know themselves and others
Will recognize here, too,
That the Middle East and the West
Can no longer be separated."

In the spirit of this quote from Goethe's West-Eastern Divan, we're offered chai tea before filling out paperwork. Arrive, breathe, take your time—only stress and frenzy are unwelcomed here. This is otherwise known as the alpine caravan weekend in Ellmau organized by Schmidt siblings Peter, Andreas and Magdalena. That these three developed the concept is certainly no coincidence: their parents used to run another hotel in the same location. Mr. and Mrs. Schmidt also had a carriage company in Iran and took their children along on trips. It's easy to imagine how this unusual, colorful, magical world impresses its guests just like the young Schmidts remembered it. When they took over the family business, the siblings adopted every accommodation concept from the Middle East to their alpine world. It took two years to turn their vision into a reality in 2009: a caravan hotel in the spectacular Austrian mountains.

In the meantime, we're still at the reception! Allow yourself to take in the heavy rugs, rectilinear urban wooden furniture and precious stone. Another ritual is meant to ease the transition from everyday life into this timeless, exotic world. We get to choose our favorite piece for our room among a tantalizing aromatic selection of handmade natural soaps. Lavender, hay flowers or meadow herbs? Reception Director Brigitte Zettl insists they're all self-professed craftsmen. From massage oil to natural exfoliation through to soap, the team personally sees to it that select ingredients are given due value: organic vegetable oils, for example, mixed with essential oils or organic herbs from their own garden and the region.