

# Influencers in Hospitality

**Influencers in Hospitality** is a regular RLA Q&A with movers and shakers of the hospitality world, providing enlightening industry perspectives whilst sharing some personal traits that have made them successful.

RLA's Influencer in Hospitality is Dr. Maria Ridao Alonso. She is currently both the Managing Director and Medical Director of Dubai Herbal and Treatment centre (DHTC), which was founded in 2003 under the auspices of His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.

**RLA: Is there a particular skill or attribute that has helped you in your successful career?**

MRA: There are two things I believe have helped me a lot: my work experience in the field of Psychiatry to understand how important the mind is and how much it needs to be part of any wellbeing and health approach/concept, and second being fluent in several languages, because that gives more clients the possibility to express themselves in their mother tongue which can make them feel more comfortable and better understood. And of course my curiosity and diversity of interest including my interest in the hospitality and wellness industry.

**RLA: As the wellbeing and hospitality industry continues to grow and become ever more integrated what should we do more or less of and why?**

MRA: The overall focus has to be more on prevention, initiating sustainable lifestyle changes, offering programs and education how to maintain health rather than the concept of short term intense and fancy programs which effects will fade in short time when back to daily routine at home.

**RLA: In the next decade or two, what do you foresee changing in how illness is treated and prevented in destinations like DHTC?**

MRA: As said, the focus is already changing, shifting efforts into prevention, genetic testing, individualized and lifestyle medicine helping to understand challenges and address them with personalized recommendations, not "one fits all" general advice. And for treatment of illness the same applies, personalized medicine with modern and high tech diagnostics but a more gentle and natural holistic approach when it comes to treatments, using complementary medicine whenever possible to avoid side effects.



Dr. Maria Ridao Alonso



His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai and Dr. Maria during his highness recent visit to DHTC

**RLA: What are your views on the trending merging of Healthcare to Hospitality (H2H conversion)?**

MRA: I believe it's pretty clear that hotels and resorts in the future will play a more significant role in prevention care through a more expansive medically supervised wellbeing offering. However, invasive medical treatment should and will remain within the confines of a properly equipped and staffed healthcare location, which is commonly known as a hospital. Another viewpoint to consider is that some hospitals are becoming more hospitality orientated to appeal to patients (guests) looking for a different experience within a more wellness oriented environment.

**RLA: The DHTC Eat Well restaurant recently won the BBC Good Food Middle East Award for Best Healthy Food Restaurant. What has been the key to its popularity and success?**

MRA: It's the concept itself and the offerings, that healthy food can taste delicious and look good. The perception that healthy food is boring, taste like nothing and doesn't look appealing is still a perception that many people have.

And that people with dietary preferences including food intolerances can enjoy a good meal at the same table as their friends or family with no restrictions without anybody having to compromise on anything. And last but not least, also our efforts to keep up with innovations and trends.

**RLA: What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?**

MRA: My grandmother used to tell me that "knowledge does not occupy any space" and I should never stop learning. I think that is key for success, you never stop learning and you should be curious and interested because there is something you can learn – always.

Dr. Maria graduated in 1992 as an allopathic physician from the University of Bonn, Germany and worked for three years in neurology and four years in psychiatry. Has a master's Degree in Preventive Medicine from Dresden International University and is licensed as a conventional and as a CAM physician. She is trained in homoeopathy, naturopathy, and a certified member of the German Anti-Ageing Society (GSAAM) and of The German Society of Preventive Medicine (DGP-Med) and is fluent in English, German and Spanish.



Dr. Maria Ridao Alonso with Roger Allen, Group CEO of RLA

**RLA: What do you think is true that more people should agree with?**

MRA: In regards to health and wellbeing still there is this concept that you go to a doctor or practitioner so they can "fix" you, a very passive approach, where somebody does something for you. I believe that health and wellbeing is something very active, where you have to take initiative and do the big part of the work, doctors and practitioners are just advisers and temporary help.

**RLA: In our industry where can we find additional or hidden value?**

MRA: The hidden value can only be unlocked through personalization of healthcare services and wellbeing activities. It's not at all like the hotel industry where you can sell the same hotel room to many different types of guest. Personalisation within wellbeing has to focus on finding out and anticipating guest need, be flexible enough to change and adapt individually and consider that a different ratio of medical staff to guest is required.

**RLA: What is the most unusual thing you've had to do to "make it work"?**

MRA: Nothing unusual, just persistent hard work on a daily basis and a vision...