

## Spa Vacations

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# *Spa Vacations:*

## *Vacationing with Body, Mind and Spirit*

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You're the kind of person who enjoys the senses, who wants to be pampered, or who wants to make a healthy lifestyle a part of your everyday life. You take candle-lit baths (or wish you could), enjoy aromatherapy and appreciate the stress-relieving effects of a good massage. When it comes time to vacation, you're not just thinking sun and surf but health, diet and a mud bath! You are exactly the kind of person who may want to consider treating yourself to a spa vacation.

The word spa, taken from the name of the famous mineral springs in Spa, Belgium, has become an all-inclusive term for a commercial establishment with facilities for exercising, bathing, and treatment. The range of facilities and services available at spas run the gamut from what you might find at the local YMCA to high-end specialty spas, where your entire body-mind is completely immersed in the experience for hours at a time. The former offers fitness and health assessments, body composition analysis, personal training, physiotherapy, gymnasiums with state-of-the-art equipment, and an outdoor pool for activities like volleyball and aqua aerobics, while the latter offers a full menu of services from massage to body wraps to herbal saunas.



The scent of lavender lingers in the air. The soothing sound of softly flowing water swirls gently into your ears. Warm ginger tea tingles your taste buds. A soft robe rubs gently across your skin. A spa vacation excites the senses, but the benefits don't stop there. There's also the luxury of experiencing the long lost art of relaxation and revitalization, with no end to additional health benefits. The toxic environment and diet of the modern world exposes us to pollutants and substances that accumulate in our body tissue and bloodstream. Some spas specialize in treatments that can eliminate toxins through a combination of massage, sauna, oils, mild fasting and colon therapy. Don't be intimidated though. Nothing is more important on a spa vacation than reminding yourself that the experience is all about you! After all, sometimes simply a good sweat is all you need to feel healthier. You can do as

much or as little as you'd like to improve the feeling of your own body, and you can relax knowing you'll be under the eye of skilled therapists and nutritionists who have your best interests and desires in mind.

Two major decisions in planning a spa vacation are 1) what experiences you want from the visit, and 2) where you want to go. A wide variety of spa options are available; some focus on your diet, others on physical activity, relaxation and

pampering, and/or your spiritual health. Some spas are very structured in their approach to treatments, while others allow for individual variation. Those spas focusing on diet and exercise are typically the most structured in their disciplines and scheduling. Your goals for a spa vacation will largely dictate the type of spa you choose and your willingness to forgo flexibility during your stay. Destination? Have you always wanted to visit New York? Miami? Los Angeles? What about someplace more exotic? India? Budapest? Let your imagination roam. Spas are available around the world, allowing you to find a vacation just about anywhere your heart desires. Your travel consultant can provide you with details on dozens of spa vacations and themes and the amenities provided by each. Most spas will offer week-long packages that include meals, activities and accommodations. In some instances, steeply discounted airfares are also included.

If you are on a budget or only have time for a short trip - consider a stay at a hotel famous for its spa treatments, and you can recreate the luxury of a dedicated spa vacation on your own. Your travel agent can recommend hotels with specialized spas in most locations and may even be able to obtain special rates for you. With a spa pass, a few therapy appointments lined up, room service, and several visits to the pool, hot tub and gym, you can enjoy a few days in near heaven on your own schedule.

Upon arriving at a typical spa, you'll be greeted by a staff member who will assign your accommodations and can give you a brief tour, explaining how your time will be structured and how to prepare and dress for any planned activities. For most body services, you will undress completely, but your therapist will allow you to disrobe in private and will keep your body draped in sheets or towels, only exposing areas as needed for the treatment. During wet services such as body scrubs, body wraps and hydrotherapies, you will not be draped, in order to reap maximum benefits - but swimsuits are usually optional. Depending on the character of the spa, many aspects of treatment can be modified to your taste and budget.

Most spas have overarching dietary philosophies, and your diet during your stay will be of particular importance. Some serve alcohol and caffeine but many do not. Again, make sure to match your personal preferences closely to the character of the spa so you'll have the experience you expect and will get the most from your visit.



### Spa Etiquette

Before entering a shared pool, always shower. When enjoying the dry sauna or steam room, sit on your towel and wear the sandals provided by the spa. Customs vary in terms of whether or not to wear a swimsuit in wet facilities. Most people enjoy wet rooms in the nude with a wrapped towel, but if modesty is an issue, wearing a swimsuit is generally acceptable as well, and you can always ask about a specific spa's policies in advance.

Share public space respectfully with other spa goers. Smoking is prohibited at most spas. Turn off your cell phone when you enter a spa, or better yet, leave it in the room with the rest of your valuables - or at home, so you can truly relax.

Tipping is common practice. Some spas will include tips in their package prices. Ask the spa staff or your tour operator if you're unsure. The rule of thumb in spas is 10%-15% of the cost of service, or about \$10.00 to \$15.00 for a one-hour treatment.

## Preparations

In general, check the weather before you go so you know what to pack - and pack with your comfort in mind. Depending on your spa's activities, you may need to bring a swimsuit, workout wear, a jacket, running or walking shoes, hiking boots, and casual shoes. At some spas, clothing and equipment are available for purchase and a robe and sandals are usually provided at no additional charge. You might find that you can pack fewer toiletries, since the dressing rooms of many spas have razors, soap, shampoo, skin lotion and deodorant.

If you're going on an international trip, a valid passport and sometimes a visa is required - make sure to obtain these items well in advance of your travel dates. To protect against baggage loss, trip cancellation or interruption and unexpected health emergencies, consider purchasing travel insurance. Your travel agent can assist you with these details and any others that will help you relax and prepare for your trip.

One of the most important things you can do before your spa vacation is give yourself a day or two to mentally unwind before leaving. Though this might sound counter-intuitive, since unwinding is often the whole point of a spa vacation, this time will give your mind a chance to become more open and receptive to the experience. It is often difficult to leave work and responsibilities behind, but the sooner you start, the more benefits you'll receive from your spa vacation.

So go ahead. Pamper yourself. If you don't do it, who will?

