

# How To Choose a Health Spa

By Curt Hagedorn

The word “spa” is bandied about a lot these days. There are “spa” personal care products and “spa” towels and “spa” robes and entire “spa” bathrooms: bathrooms filled with those luxurious products and fluffy white cotton towels and robes. And don’t forget “spa” cuisine which even extends to “spa” frozen dinners. But if you really want to get to the bottom of the resurgence of spas and spa treatments, just look at our over-scheduled and stressed out lives. We all need a little more pampering on a daily (or at least weekly or monthly) basis.

The idea of a spa harks back to the turn of the last century, when the very wealthy traveled to places like Baden Baden and Nauheim in Germany to indulge in the supposed healing properties of the natural springs there. Over time, the meaning of the word spa has expanded to include all manner of pampering mixed with healing: mental, physical and spiritual. And of course, when it comes to the very wealthy, nothing has changed very much.

For example, one of the oldest spas in the United States, the Golden Door, offers guests a chance to “fulfill your dream of a perfect week in paradise” with programs designed to ‘rejuvenate mind, body and spirit.’ This kind of experience naturally does not come cheap, requiring a non-refundable deposit of \$1,000 per person, to which you’ll add an additional \$6,500 per week for a personalized fitness and treatment program, spectacular accommodations, gourmet meals created from the bounty of the Golden Door’s own gardens, and a great deal more. In the world of spas, however, the Golden Door is hardly the most expensive. Resorts around the world have jumped on the spa bandwagon and offer a wide variety not only of exercise, classes and meal plans, but programs designed to reduce stress, improve your emotional and spiritual health, raise your self esteem and, in general, prepare you to be the ultimate warrior in your chose field of endeavor when you go back to the outside world. But just because you don’t live a “rich and famous” lifestyle, doesn’t mean you don’t deserve that little something extra that rejuvenating spa treatments can provide.

If you’re looking for something a little more close to home (and a lot less pricey) there also “day spas” cropping up all over the country, many times connected with either gyms or beauty salons or as freestanding franchises, so it’s more than likely that you’ll be able to find the genuine healing properties of a spa treatment just around the corner. And spa treatments don’t have to be expensive. On a recent walk around my own neighborhood with a stressed-out friend, a local day spa was offering a special half-hour massage, pedicure manicure for only \$30.

A word to the wise: do a little research on spa treatments to find out what they entail and what kinds of products they use. Though there should be very little risk, it's possible that, since many spas use all natural ingredients (even vegetables and fruits) to create their proprietary products, you might be allergic. Like in a restaurant, it's always best to ask. Also, massage and other physical therapists and teachers often have licensing and other requirements they must pass. Look for these before you put your body in their hands. In general: if you are paying for classes or treatments it's a good idea to have a resume and references up front which, fortunately, most spas however large or small provide. Remember, if the services and treatments are as effective as they say, there should be plenty of people willing to sing their praises. Also, ask your friends, colleagues, and of course your hairdresser or other beauty professional for recommendations. Your local hair salon may be offering a variety of services from manicures and pedicures to massage, facials and body wraps that you never even knew about.

Finally, even if you can't indulge in a week of spa treatments, a simple half hour chair massage, a facial or other treatment can often provide just what you need to relieve the stress and anxiety of your everyday life, and in most cases you can purchase the healing products to take home, and your local spa practitioner often offers classes or other advice on how best to use them between visits as part of a stress-relieving program of yoga, meditation or other exercise that emphasizes stretching and breathing. Most of us never take the time to really relax and be pampered. With more spas and spa treatments available than ever before, it's time we started.