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PASSPORT

THE SPA ISSUE!

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Six Senses Spa at Alpina Gstaad

A photograph of a modern, luxurious indoor spa. The space features a large, curved swimming pool with blue water. The ceiling is made of dark wood with circular openings. Several large, rustic wooden pillars support the ceiling. In the background, there are lounge chairs and a brick wall. The overall atmosphere is warm and relaxing.

THE WORLD'S MOST INCREDIBLE SPAS!

We've all heard the term "positive thinking," but when it comes to spas it's all about blissful thinking, combined, of course, with sensual treatments that are designed to rejuvenate body, mind, and spirit. Whether you book a day at the spa or plan to spend your entire holiday being pummeled and pampered, *Passport* has left no hot stone unturned or therapy untried, to bring you our favorite spas from around the globe. When planning your next delightfully indulgent getaway, you're sure to find the treatment of your dreams at one of these exceptional locations. Whether it's a couple's massage, mud bath, or seaweed facial, the astounding array of international spas covered here is sure to provide you with just what you need to relax and revitalize.

EUROPE

SPA AT PÄDASTE MUHU, ESTONIA

Muhu is one of the most historic and beautiful of Estonia's more than 2,000 islands, easily accessible from the mainland by a half-hour ferry ride, but far enough away to have retained its own brand of Estonian culture, along with its own sense of island tranquility. Set along the island's southern coast, Pädaste is a 15th-century countryside manor that's been lovingly converted into one of Estonia's most luxurious spa hotels by partners Martin Breuer and Imre Sooäär (who also happens to be a member of the Estonian Parliament). The manor's intimate **Spa at Pädaste** features a range of sumptuous treatments, many inspired by centuries of local Estonian traditions. The Muhu Hay Bath (30 min/\$100) uses fragrant field-flower-filled hay from local meadows to stimulate and heal the body (as locals have done for hundreds of years), while the Muhu Mud Wrap (45 min/\$100) uses local sea mud (revered for its anti-rheumatic properties) for a treatment based on Estonia's "Kurbad" tradition, wherein heat calms the body and creates the sensation of floating. Inside the spa's wood sauna, grab a cluster of young birch branches and flog your skin to stimulate circulation, just as locals have done since time immemorial. The spa's terrace, overlooking a serene pond and the bay beyond, features a Siberian cold tub, while a seawater hot tub awaits by the bay. All oils, creams, and spreads used at Spa at Pädaste are prepared fresh daily, using only pure and natural ingredients. Treatments can be purchased à la carte or bundled into a half-day package—or even into a three-day program to induce a state of complete relaxation. www.padaste.ee/spa

—Dan Allen

HARMONY SPA AT ARIA HOTEL BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Voted the world's #1 hotel last year in Trip Advisor's Travelers Choice Awards, Budapest's **Aria Hotel** is an elite member of the divine Library Hotel Collection, which also includes New York City's Hotel Giraffe and Library Hotel, and Toronto's long-awaited Hotel X. With a prime location just steps from St. Stephen's Basilica in the center of Budapest, the fantastic five-star Aria is infused with a musical theme throughout, which carries over strongly into its Harmony Spa. The spa's beautiful indoor heated pool is strikingly backed by a mural sporting the silhouette of a jazz ensemble, while the statue of a singer perches at the pool's edge. Harmony Spa's collection of signature music-inspired treatments comes in four categories: Classical, Jazz, Opera, and Contemporary, each with its own related massage, scrub, and wrap. Classical lovers, for instance, can choose the Senses of Aria Massage (60 min/\$110) with a soundtrack of Debussy, Chopin, and Vivaldi, while jazz lovers can opt for a Detoxifying Green Tea Body Wrap (90 min/\$155) to the sounds of Billie Holliday, Pat Metheny, and Stan Getz. Those with more contemporary tastes can pick the Orange Cream Body Scrub (45 min/\$125) with the likes of Café de Mar, Olafur Arnalds, and Vangelis as their musical backdrop, while for opera fans there's the Spicy Indian Body Scrub (45 min/\$125) with vocals by artists like Andrea Bocelli, Plácido Domingo, and Sarah Brightman. Skewing more local, the special Hungarian Rhapsody Treatment (90 min/\$225) is inspired by Hungary's famed thermal baths, and uses Széchenyi thermal water, Damask rose water, and wildflowers handpicked from the Pannonia region for an unforgettable aquatic experience. For a man-focused indulgence, the Gentleman's Choice (90 min/\$245) starts with deep exfoliation, followed by a rejuvenating moisturizer and a facial mask. www.harmonyspabudapest.com

—Dan Allen

ALPINA DOLOMITES GARDENA HEALTH LODGE AND SPA SOUTH TYROL, ITALY

Up at 6,100 feet in the Alpe di Siusi, Europe's largest high-altitude plateau, the speed of life is slow and assiduous. Think Italian hospitality with German effi-

ciency. Jagged peaks of the Dolomites peer over the indoor and outdoor panoramic pool and sauna of the **Alpina Dolomites Gardena Health Lodge and Spa**. Reclined seats in the outdoor area of the pool provide a throne from which to take in the sunshine, the sound of cow bells, and the smell of fresh flowers. The spa, with big glass windows looking to the mountains, includes a Finnish sauna, a bio-herb sauna, a salt bath, an aroma bath, and indoor and outdoor relaxation areas with water bed and lounge chairs. Detox in the evenings with the daily *Aufguss Zeremonie* or "ventilation ceremony," where a college boy from a local village pours scented water into the heater of the sauna and waves hot air at you, twirling a wet towel in the air, until you're sweating from pores you didn't know you had. Then, book a session with at the "beauty farm" for a customized one-off or multi-day / multi-week treatment. I recommend the 1-one extravaganza "Alpina Beauty Special" (\$400), which includes an intensive facial treatment, body peeling, body massage, manicure, hand massage, pedicure, footbath, and foot massage. Therapists at the Alpina Dolomites also use the Sothys Paris line for a complete menu of facials, including a special 60-minute detox treatment for men (\$125). www.alpinadolomites.it/en

—Allister Chang

43 THE SPA AT HOTEL ARTS BARCELONA BARCELONA, SPAIN

Frank Gehry's iconic bronze seaside fish sculpture, *Peix*, greets you at ground level as you enter the design-centric five-star Hotel Arts Barcelona, but you're headed to almost the top of its 44-story building to the lavish **43 The Spa**. Offering incredible views of the Mediterranean coastline from inside its glass-paneled walls (and even wider panoramic vistas from outside on its open-air terraces), 43 The Spa offers a host of pampering options, including two phenomenal signature treatments. The Sublime Diamond Journey (140 min/\$370) uses real diamond dust for full-body exfoliation, followed by a concentrated hydration cream to make skin silky smooth, and a facial-lifting treatment to immediately firm the skin. The 43 Experience (80 min/\$230), meanwhile, is a massage specialized to stimulate the senses and deeply relax the entire body, incorporating a variety of chiropractic and pressure techniques, stretching maneuvers, and aromatherapy oils. Other popular body treatments include the Citrus Body Scrub (40 min/\$90), an antioxidant treatment that infuses skin with Vitamin C; the Citrus Body Soufflé (80 min/\$195), which starts with an orange micro-sponge body scrub and ends with a citrus wrap; the Diamond Rose Ritual (80 min/\$215), which includes Damask rose, and diamond dust exfoliation, followed by rose cream hydration; and the CO₂ Body Perfection (80 min/\$195), wherein after a chemical body scrub, a textured mousse mask is applied to oxygenate the skin. For those in a hurry, the spa offers several 30-minute treatments, including Ready to Shine (\$95), which uses carboxytherapy (or an application of CO₂) to combat the signs of skin aging. All treatments use divine products from Spanish luxury brand Natura Bissé. www.hotelartsbarcelona.com

—Dan Allen

SIX SENSES SPA AT ALPINA GSTAAD GSTAAD, SWITZERLAND

Gstaad has long been a respite of luxury and outdoor sport, dating back to the early 20th-century construction of the Montreux Oberland Bahn (MOB) railway network (now called the GoldenPass Line). While skiing, snowboarding, and other alpine adventures are a significant draw, Gstaad's impeccable five-star hotels attract winter revelers to the region's world-renowned slopes. Each is unique in its design aesthetic and offerings, but for those seeking modern flair and an award-winning spa should look no further than the stunning Alpina Gstaad. Designed by P49 Bangkok, **Six Senses Spa** is an idyllic retreat to sooth sore muscles after a day in the brisk elements. With more than 21,000 square feet and featuring 12 treatments rooms, Six Sense indulges in every luxury, including a floatation room, Turkish-style hammam, color therapy room, and salt room. Guests can also discover an indoor pool, yoga studio, two Jacuzzis, and a garden pool open all year round, kept at a muscle-relaxing temperature and with mountain views in every direction. It is the expertise of Spa Director Petula Elzenaar and her trained



Six Senses Spa at Alpina Gstaad

therapists that turn this oasis into a true healing center for mind and body. Standout treatments include the deep tissue massage (60 min/\$212), an intense oil-based massage that relies on cupping to improve blood flow; the men's rejuvenation facial (60 min/\$191), is a purifying and restorative treatment that uses iLa skincare products with Amazonian plant extracts to refresh and rejuvenate. For those with the budget and an eye for self-improvement, the iridology consultation (90 min/\$497) will explore organ functionality through marks, discolorations, and other visible signs in the iris. Beyond the Six Senses Spa, guests should allow ample time to explore the hotel's jaw-dropping art collection, which includes metal sculptures by Ann Carrington, Alpine découpage landscapes by Anne Rosat, and soothing mixed media installations by Berlin-based artist Santiago Taccetti. www.thealpinagstaad.com

—Matthew Wexler

ASIA

WILLOW STREAM SPA AT FAIRMONT PEACE HOTEL SHANGHAI, CHINA

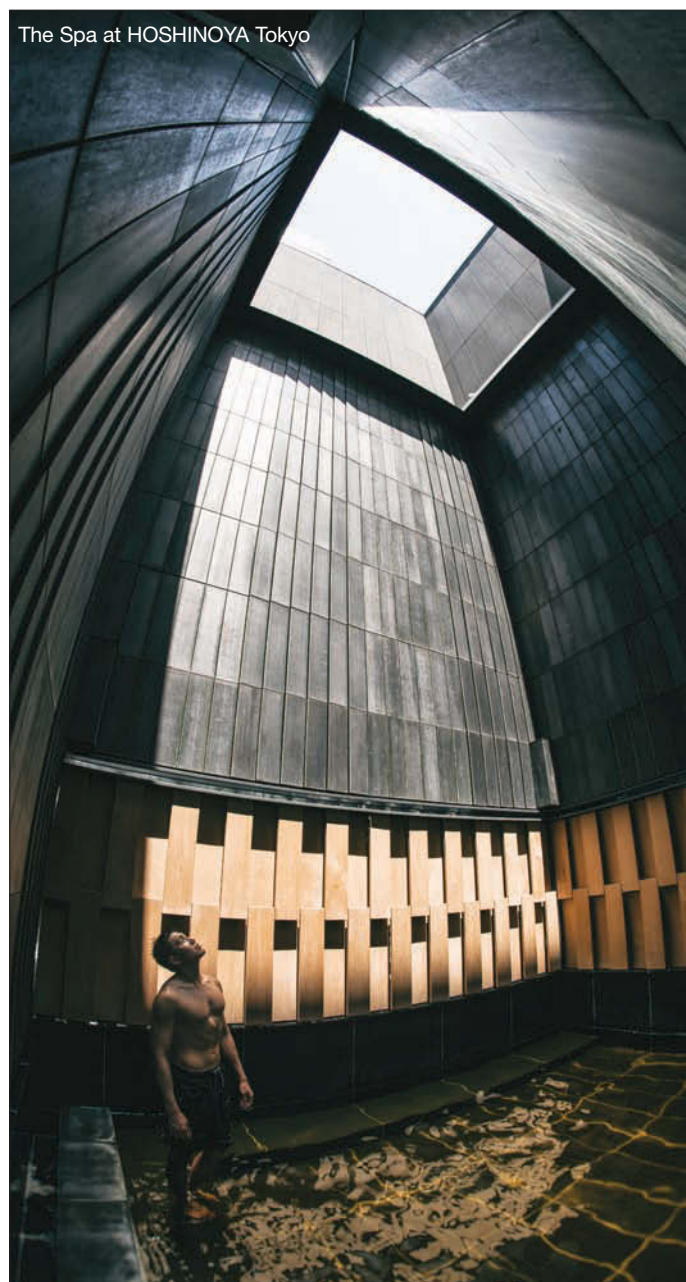
A whopping three-year closure, between 2007-2010, saw a glorious restoration and updating of this historic property on Shanghai's buzzing waterfront district, the Bund, which has played host to luminaries including Marlene Dietrich, Noel Coward, and, in 2016, Justin Trudeau. The **Willow Stream Spa** is cozy and classic, meant to evoke Shanghai of the 1920s and 30s, with mossy greens, amber, marble, and Chinese carvings. A skylit indoor swimming pool and 11 treatment rooms fill out the space, and the menu includes upscaled takes on traditional Chinese treatments. One of those, which may intimidate those who have seen its after-effects, is *gua sha* (a scraping of the back regarded as a remedy for illness that often leaves horrific, plum and bing cherry-red streaks and patches for several days). However, the version found in Willow Stream's Chinese Remedy Journey, at (90 min/\$218, 120 min/\$276) is refined and more of an inspiration, and won't leave marks unless you specifically request that.

"You need to see a medical practitioner for the real deal," I was informed. The Chinese Remedy also features aromatherapy massage and pressure point foot reflexology. The Bamboo Fusion (90 min/\$247), meanwhile, incorporated heated bamboo and herbs "to promote circulation and sensory nerve perception." Since I was seeking relaxation, I ultimately opted for the Willow Stream Wisdom (90 min/\$188), the centerpiece of which is a heated herbal pouch containing five herbs, including Absinthe ingredient wormwood, believed to absorb muscle tension and get the blood flowing. It lived up to its promise! Next time, I'll probably try the Aroma Herbal Yoga Therapist (90 min/\$188), which adds traditional stretching, Tui Na, and Shiatsu techniques to unlock all that energy. Also tempting: a Recharge (80 min/\$306) with jetlag cure massage, foot reflexology, and Golden Caviar facial. East meets West in a most decadent manner! www.fairmont.com/peace-hotel-shanghai/willow-stream

—Lawrence Ferber

THE SPA AT HOSHINOYA TOKYO TOKYO, JAPAN

In July 2016, **Hoshino Resorts** opened Tokyo's first luxury *ryokan*, (a traditional Japanese inn with spa traditions that date as far back as the eighth century). On the top floor of this skyscraper is a hot spring that is well worth a detour. Right at the heart of Tokyo's bustling financial district, this one may be the world's most conveniently located natural saltwater hot spring. After a late night out in one of Tokyo's 300 gay bars, an alkaline soak and massage at HOSHINOYA Tokyo should wash away any fatigue. Ocean water has been pumped up to the hotel's top floor to fill a 484-square-meter pool. High black walls block out light and sound from the busy streets below, opening an ethereal window to a square slice of the skies above. Keep in mind that in Japan, tattoos are associated with Yakuza (members of organized crime). You may not be allowed into the hot spring if you have visible tattoos. After your soak, head to your private tatami-matted treatment room for a range of services. The *Kohaku Treatment* (90 min/\$155) is a gentle massage of the scalp, neck, knees, and



The Spa at HOSHINOYA Tokyo

Photo: Cassidy DuHon Photography

elbows. Therapists use custom-blended aroma oils (my favorite is their blend of hinoki, ginger, and *pinus pentaphylla*). For something different, try the *shiki* (90 min/\$185) treatment, where the arms and back are massaged with balls filled with steamed seasonal Japanese herbs. For something deeper, book the *Moegi* Full-Body Treatment (90 min/\$155) focusing on tensions in the back and legs. Afterward, treat yourself to a three-hour culinary exploration in the hotel, lead by Executive Chef Noriyuki Hamada. www.hoshinoyatokyo.com/en

—Allister Chang

THE SPA AT MANDARIN ORIENTAL TAIPEI TAIPEI, TAIWAN

Since it opened in 2015, Taipei's 303-room Mandarin Oriental has played host to celebrities including Madonna and Coldplay, and seriously high-end VIPs. You may not spot Madge during a visit to **The Spa**, but you will be met with the sublime design work of gay power couple Yabu Pushelberg that eschews obvious Taiwanese motifs for more modern, slick, and subtly rendered local inspirations. Spread over two floors and nearly 38,000 square feet, and also

encompassing a fitness and wellness center with outdoor heated pool, a beauty salon, and boutique, the spa composes 12 treatment suites, gender segregated experience showers, crystal steam rooms, vitality pools, saunas, and ice fountains. Sense of place figures heavily in the treatment menu via traditional and contemporary Taiwanese therapies, particularly with signature Suite Experiences and Journey packages. The Formosa (150 min/\$321) incorporates sea pearl and salt skin polish, a white mud wrap, scalp and face gua sha scraping, and a drink of high mountain oolong tea. The blissful Zhongyang (170 min/\$388) features an oolong tea body exfoliation, a mandarin, frankincense and ginger soak, and body massage. Want to go full-on VIP? Order the Royal Sturgeon (170 min/\$1,179) golden caviar body treatment and facial, complete with an Oscietra snack and beverage. Meanwhile, the Gentleman Essentials section boasts massages designed for alleviating jetlag; Red Eye (90 min/\$190) and post-exercise fatigue; Urban Back Relief (90 min/\$190), plus facials. I opted for the Oriental Fusion (60 min/\$125) massage, a blend of Asian/Western techniques and my choice of oil (lemon, lavender, or rose). As I was suffering from an unfortunate, painful case of frozen shoulder (a temporary albeit massively uncomfortable affliction), my therapist was especially mindful of my limited movement range and was careful with my arm. Afterward, feeling loosened up, I was ushered to the tea lounge, where one has the choice of a cozy communal area or more private-style quarters and adjustable recliners, plus a selection of tea and pastries. I left feeling just as radiant as Madonna, albeit without the paparazzi. www.mandarinoriental.com/taipei/luxury-spa

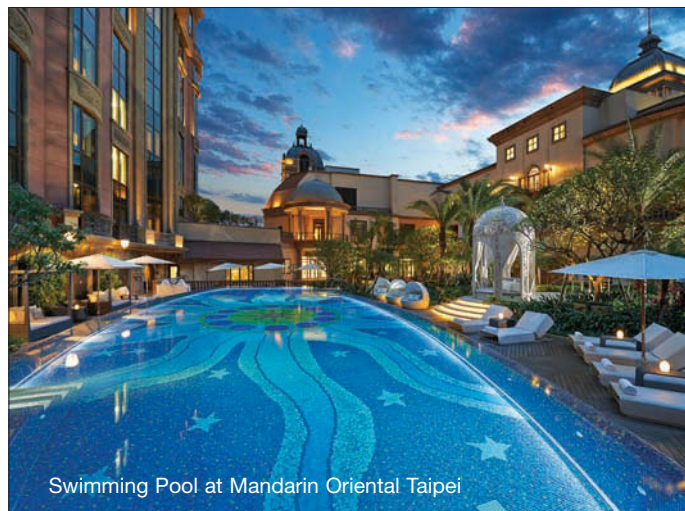
—Lawrence Ferber

AUSTRALIA/OCEANIA

SPAQ

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

The flagship property of Australia's wonderfully quirky and stylish QT Hotel family, the QT Sydney blends Gothic, art deco, and Italianate-influenced architecture, and coats it all in a hip, arty, playful, and attitude-free sensibility that's unmistakable from the moment you arrive (the hotel's door girls, for example, don red bobs and black berets). Tucked on the QT's mezzanine, the **spaQ** offers an array of treatments geared toward modern world travelers, including quite a few dedicated solely to bringing out your mug's most selfie-worthy best. The Facial Therapy by Kerstin Florian menu includes a Signature Caviar Facial (60 min/\$175, 90 min/\$230), which uses a combination of cell-rejuvenating caviar and Chinese botanical antioxidants to increase collagen production, soften lines and wrinkles, and give your skin a powerfully youthful puff. The Facial Therapy by USPA menu includes two facials formulated just for men: the Fast Eddy Men's Facial (30 min/\$75), which uses products with grapefruit, bamboo, ginseng, aloe vera, and green tea; and the longer Supernatural Men's Facial (60 min/\$120), which makes use of products with



Swimming Pool at Mandarin Oriental Taipei

birch extract, almond oil, and ginseng. As an extra-special bonus for guys, spaQ features its own classic barber shop with antique leather barber chairs. Opt for a simple haircut (30 min/\$40), or treat yourself to a traditional wet shave, featuring steaming scented towel, rich shaving cream, and a straight razor. Two shaves are on the menu: The Don (30 min/\$40) to get you cleaned up and in and out quickly and Mr. Bond (45 min/\$60), where additional attention is paid to unruly eyebrows and such, and the treatment is capped by a shoulder or hand and arm massage. It's all deeply relaxing, but just to be sure all barber shop services come with whiskey neat, courtesy of Chivas Regal. www.qthotelsandresorts.com/sydney-cbd/spaq

—Dan Allen

SOUTH AMERICA

AQLLA SPA AT SUMAQ MACHU PICCHU MACHU PICCHU, PERU

One may not ordinarily consider a World Heritage Site a wondrous place for spa treatments, but within Sumaq Machu Picchu, the area's sole luxury hotel, **Aqla Spa** offers a serene underground enclave away from tourists and steep hiking trails. In the indigenous Quechua language, "aqla" means "chosen one," which defines the spa's indulgent, locally inspired atmosphere. Ancient Incan sensory experiences abound, from hydrotherapy and fragrance, to soothing sounds and colors. The steam-sauna hut within the spa feels especially detoxifying, helping to boost circulation and purify skin. New to the treatment menu is a three-part quinoa facial (45 min/\$55). It makes use of the "super grain" native to the Andes Mountains that's found on most restaurant menus, but here is used as a facial ingredient for soft exfoliation to nourish, hydrate, and seal in nutrients. Peruvians exalt the earth's natural wonders, so the Andean Stone (90 min/\$110) massage uses stones from the surrounding mountains, "filled with the energy of the Andes," to help realign your body and energy on a cellular level for a deeper sense of calm and well-being. Aqla's staff expertly target the tender legs and backs of travelers weary from the long trek to Machu Picchu. So consider the favorite El Aqla Massage (90 min/\$110) to indulge in three of the spa's top treatments (including reflexology) in a single session. Then ease into the Jacuzzi for a relaxing, aromatic experience reflecting back on this magical corner of the world. www.machupicchuhotels-sumaq.com

—Kelsy Chauvin

NORTH AMERICA

WILLIOW STREAM SPA AT FAIRMONT EMPRESS VICTORIA, CANADA

June 2017 saw a grand reopening brouhaha for Victoria's iconic grand dame property. Completed in two phases, the \$46 million restoration and modernization includes a stunning new lobby and restaurant/bar, updated 464 rooms, dramatic Fairmont Gold Lounge with a patio overlooking Victoria's vibrant Inner Harbour, and, of course, reborn **Willow Stream Spa**. Local culture, surroundings, and therapies inform each Willow Stream location, and Vancouver Island's lush nature and oceanfront serves as inspiration and ingredients within this two-floor, 11-room oasis. The Coastal Retreat (90 min/\$175) balances sea and land through a seasalt scrub and mud wrap evoking earthy hiking trails, while a lavender massage draws from Victoria's aromatic, gorgeous lavender fields. I opted for the ocean-centric Salish Sea Vitality (90 min/\$175), which spotlights products from local company Seaflora, which utilizes ten different types of seaweed, ocean mud, and marine minerals in its line. My excellent, communicative therapist, Marion, explained every step and instruction clearly, while educating me on seaweed's mineral-rich properties: it's apparently as nourishing as mother's milk, sans nipples. The Salish Sea Vitality commenced with a scrub and wrap, during which several sections of kelp were applied to my body. During the subsequent rinse, a large, rubbery kelp square was given to me as a washcloth, and the shower truly smelled of ocean and nori soon enough, which made me crave sushi. Afterward, it was on to the table for a massage with Sea Kelp Lotion and Seaweed Gel, which was perfectly sooth-



Willow Stream Spa at The Fairmont Empress, Victoria

ing. Following the treatment, I was handed a bag containing the washcloth-sized kelp strip that I could refrigerate for up to a week and reactivate for several additional days' worth of fucoidan and mineral benefits. www.fairmont.com/empress-victoria/willow-stream

—Lawrence Ferber

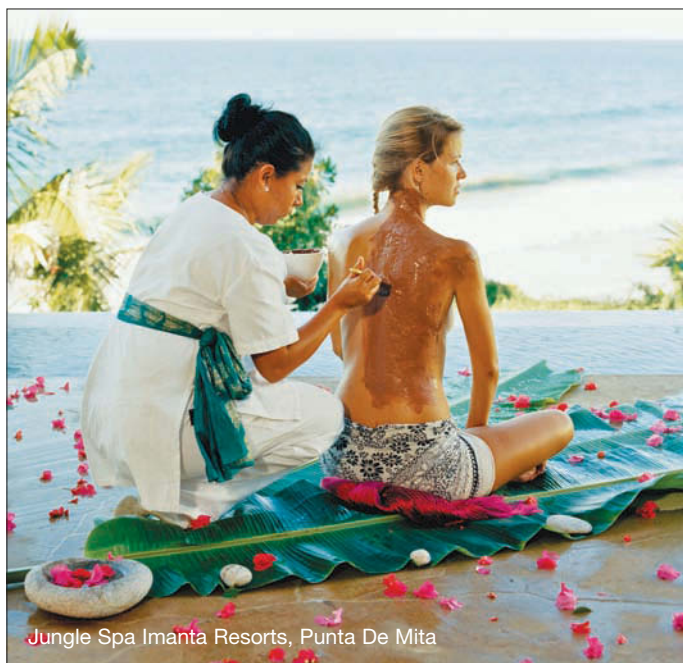
EFOREA SPA AT HILTON LOS CABOS LOS CABOS, MEXICO

Los Cabos stands out from other Mexico beach destinations because it's teeming with the most notable, luxury-drenched, five-star resorts. You can thank Hollywood since celebrities flock here in private jets (it's only two hours away by flight), raising the stakes for accommodations, back-bending service, and amenities that spoil you. There are some prominent properties like Las Ventanas, The Resort at Pedregal, Esperanza, and One&Only. While Hilton Los Cabos does not necessarily fit into this pack, it feels close enough. In fact, considering it was originally intended to open as a Waldorf Astoria, it's one of the better Hilton resorts in the world. If I could give all the reasons how Hilton Los Cabos exceeded my expectations, we'd be here a while, so I'll focus on the spa, a true highlight, not just for the property but for Cabo in general. **Eforea Spa** debuted last summer after a multi-million renovation, and it's a genuine destination spa. The 9,700-square-foot, 15-treatment-room sanctuary is imaginative and luxurious. Guests will feel the magic as soon as they enter the alfresco spa entrance that honors local heritage, mirroring a Mexican-style patio with a "living vertical garden wall" (potted herbs are used in treatments), white jasmine, and floating chairs. In addition to a salon and movement studio, each separate men and women's areas are part of the journey. The men's facility included a beautifully tiled aromatherapy steam room, sauna and whirlpool in a very spacious, design-forward, chilled-out retreat. Connecting with its holistic vibe, most treatments focus on native rituals with local ingredients, though I opted for a Sports Massage (50 min/\$130), which was performed with perfect pressure. The Lemongrass Mimosa Body Scrub (50 min/\$135) used lemongrass so fresh I assume it was plucked straight from their vertical garden. The body scrub obviously exfoliates dead cells (it was mixed with bamboo), but it was the scent and feel of my body that made me avoid immediately getting in the ocean or pool afterward. The spa truly goes all the way for guests, who can make their own bath sea salts or receive a traditional Mayan blessing in the Zen garden. www.hiltonloscabos.com

—Jimmy Im

BANYAN TREE MAYAKOBA PLAYA DEL CARMEN, MEXICO

At our couples' massage at the **Banyan Tree Mayakoba**, my husband and I *oohed* and *aahed* in harmony. The technique and timing of our therapists was uncannily synchronized. When I first met my therapist, I was skeptical.



Jungle Spa Imanta Resorts, Punta De Mita

She was petite and elegant, and I like it hard and rough. But here in Playa del Carmen, a short flight from New York, I found a *rara avis* that eludes many of the top spas in the West: a therapist with a deep knowledge of pressure points. The **Banyan Tree Spa** has successfully built a reputation for offering consistent and exquisite spa treatments. All therapists are accredited by Banyan Tree Spa Academy in Phuket, Thailand and Bintan, Indonesia. Here at Banyan Tree Mayakoba, there's no question that the brand's mission is to create a "Sanctuary for the Senses." Before our massage treatment, we took a journey through eight different hydrothermal therapies in the Rainforest Trail, a private guided sauna experience that is so luxurious you almost feel bad not sharing it. Pro tip: ask for extended time on the Rainforest Trail in order to go back to your favorite stations at your leisure. There's plenty of space, so don't hesitate to experience it with a group of friends. For the ultimate luxury getaway, book a Spa Sanctuary Villa, starting at \$1,399 per night. This bespoke experience includes unlimited spa treatments. Treatment menu items include Ayurvedic, Balinese, lomi lomi, sports therapy, and Thai classic massages. Though it is unlikely you'll want to leave your private villa (did I mention that you have your own private outdoor infinity pool and Jacuzzi?). The Mayakoba resort also offers a range of activities and culinary experiences. Taste the fresh catch of the day at the Sands Beach Club or go for a guided Kayak tour through the lagoon. Call the front desk anytime for a complimentary golf-cart ride to the beach, gym, or any other room in the resort. Back at our private villa, my husband and I ordered a bubble bath in our outdoor tub, and let any final worries soak away. Only the nosiest spider monkeys heard our whispered secrets. www.banyantree.com/en/em-mexico-mayakoba

—Allister Chang

JUNGLE SPA AT IMANTA RESORTS PUNTA DE MITA, MEXICO

Owner Juan Mario Sahagun was so captivated by the pristine coastline along Mexico's western shores that he leapt from his *panga* (small boat) and swam to shore to further explore what would eventually become Imanta Resorts. The lush, 250-acre jungle retreat is now one of Riviera Nayarit's most luxurious and coveted getaways, boasting private suites and casas including Casona Jaguar, a 10,000-square-foot showstopper with three bedrooms, private pool, and ocean views. The pampering begins upon arrival with fresh tropical juices and a presentation where guests can choose from handcrafted and organic soaps such as avocado-herb or lavender and oats that are then cut to order and

replenished throughout your stay. Days can be filled exploring the private oasis or venturing into nearby Sayulita for a surf lesson and freshly made tacos, but be sure to allow ample time to experience Imanta's **Jungle Spa**. Ensnared amid the secluded palms, a concrete and gypsum path imprinted with local foliage such as banana and heliconia leaves reveals open-air treatment rooms. Signature wrap treatments include Birds of Paradise (85 min/\$360), which begins with an exfoliation followed by a 30-minute massage and finally a wrap that features locally grown mint and aloe vera. Tarzan's Facial (85 min/\$150) was developed specifically for men and combines deep cleansing and clarifying properties and also includes a foot massage. Standard fare massages; Hot Stone (85 min/\$240), Deep Tissue (55 min/\$190), Swedish (55 min/\$160) are elevated with the use of essential oils and the intoxicating open-air environment. Be sure to allow enough time for a plunge in the outdoor suite's soaking tub, carved from a single granite boulder. The pink-tinged rocks appear throughout the property and pave the way to other amenities, such as the "Observatorio," where you can sip mezcal margaritas and take in the sunset. www.imantaresorts.com

—Matthew Wexler

USA

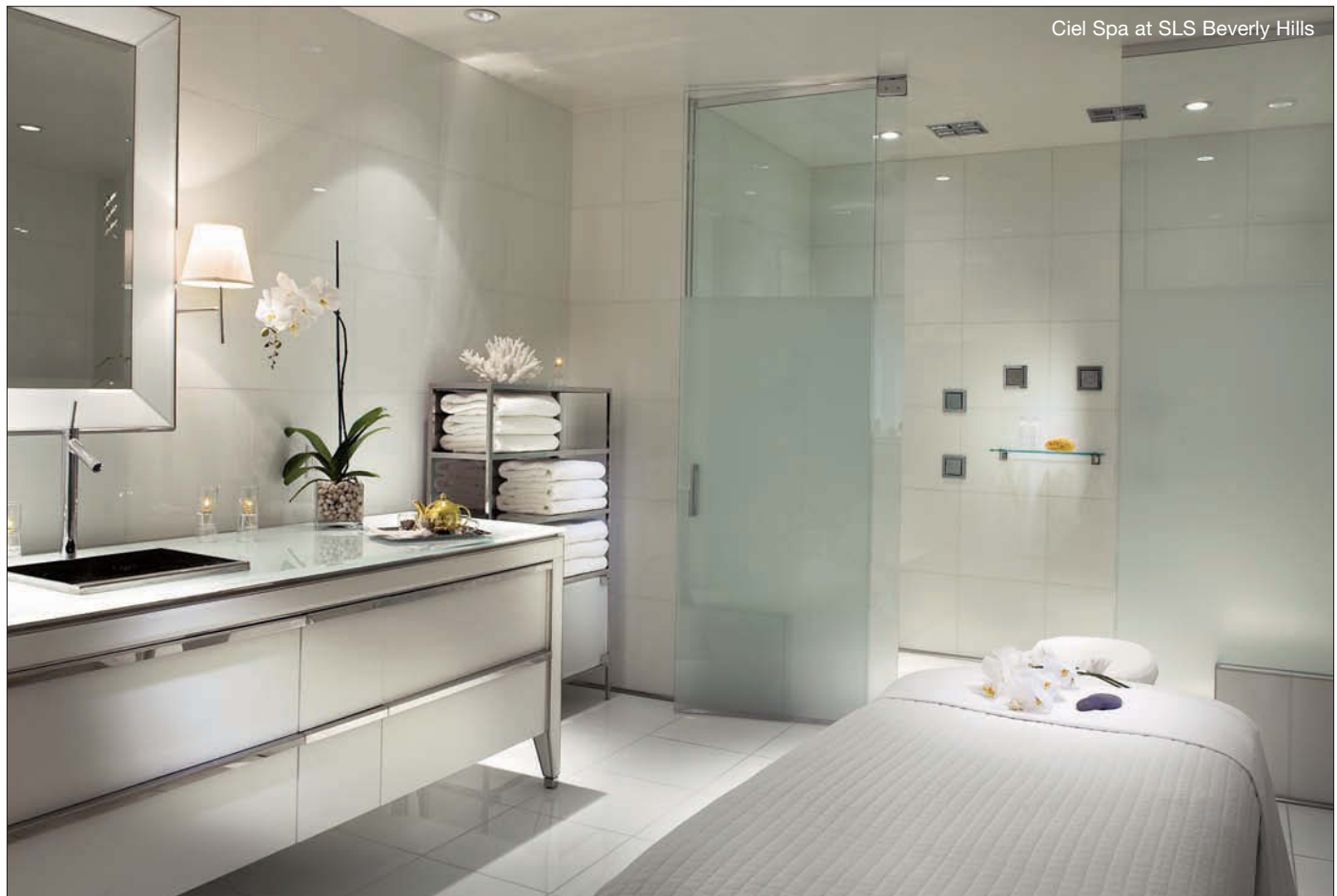
WELLNESS WISDOM BENICIA, CALIFORNIA

If you're visiting the charming Bay Area town of Benicia (which, by the way, you should), be sure and stop in lovely **Wellness Wisdom** for a series of treatments ranging from massage to acupuncture to more unique sessions. Step into this small day spa which celebrates 20 years of destressing this year, right on Benicia's main drag, and you'll be transported to a world of serenity. Spend a few minutes in the tranquil lobby under the benevolent eye of a placid Buddha. Then head to the earth-toned treatment rooms for one of their many facials (\$75-135) or a Stress Release massage, which combines Swedish, Acupressure, and deep-tissue techniques (90 min/105). You might want to experience the hot stone therapy (90 min/135), which uses these rocks to send heat deep into your tired muscles. With an acupuncturist on staff, Wellness Wisdom offers this meridian-stimulating treatment for healing (\$100), but if you want something even more unconventional, experience an acutonics (sound therapy) treatment (60 min/\$85). This unique journey uses tuning forks, placed at specific points on the body, to send the sound wave vibrations deep into your body, clearing your chakras and balancing your meridians in quintessentially Northern California spirit. www.wellnesswisdom.us

—Rich Rubin

CIEL SPA AT SLS BEVERLY HILLS BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA

The recently revamped **Ciel Spa** at SLS Beverly Hills was the first full-service hotel spa in LA to offer facials and anti-aging treatments featuring Bioologique Recherche. The cult skincare line's aestheticians are intensely trained to assess the skin before recommending a treatment, to ensure the skin is healthier and more balanced after every facial. They get results using a combination of quick pulsing finger strokes, plus therapeutic devices like cleansing brushes and ice therapy. Philippe Starck designed the new spa in almost all white, with a minimal look and comfortable couches throughout. Although there is a shower and steam room in the separate men's and women's locker rooms, the changing areas are laughably small, so it's not a place you'd want to hang out. But guests come for the treatments, not the locker rooms, and there is a peaceful co-ed lounge area surrounded by billowy white curtains where you can relax with teas and munchies between treatments. In addition to top-notch custom facials (starting at \$200, with an express refresher for \$130), and massage (starting at \$185), they also offer treatments tailored to LA's celebrity culture. For about \$500 per session, guests can receive IV nutrient therapy specifically designed to boost immunity, offer hangover relief, support weight loss, or anti-aging, delivered by on-staff nurses. You can also saturate your body with oxygen, reduce inflammation and promote wound healing by slipping into their



Ciel Spa at SLS Beverly Hills

Hyperbaric Oxygen Chamber (60 min/\$250) for a rejuvenating nap. SLS is close to everything in LA, so whether you're there for a romantic dinner and couple's massage, or to splurge on an entire red carpet ready package, this trendy spa has you covered www.cielspabeverlyhills.com

—Paul Horne

TOMOKO BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA

As Beverly Hills spas compete for greater size and over-the-top luxury, there is a tiny jewel in the crown of LA spas that's outshining them all. **Tomoko** Japanese spa is so understated you could easily miss the entrance on bustling Beverly Drive, but I knew it was special the moment I stepped inside. The receptionist smiled warmly, greeted me by name and suggested I slip into their traditional Japanese sandals, adding with a whisper "Don't worry about your shoes, we'll take care of everything." She led me to a comfortable lounge where I sat by the fireplace while she served tea, lemon water, and impeccably placed chocolates. A few minutes later my therapist escorted me to a large private suite with massage bed, sitting area, and shower. I sipped tea during the 15-minute detox foot soak and reflexology massage which begins every treatment, then moved to the table for the Tomoko massage, which included elements of Swedish and Thai Massage plus stretching (60 min/\$210 + 15 minute foot soak). Afterward, the therapist suggested I shower and relax in the suite, before heading back to the lounge, where the bliss continued with ginger tea, cold peppermint water, a Thai coconut-jelly skewer, and the creamiest mochi I've ever tasted. Every single design element has been considered, down to the tiny embedded light in the check presenter, which illuminated when I opened it so I could read the bill in the dimly lit room. There are only four large suites and no shared locker room, so at no point during my visit did I ever come into contact with another client, which is probably why this place is a celebrity fave. They

also offer a series of couples' massages starting at \$630 for two, and even the option to have sushi from nearby Sugarfish waiting for you after your treatment. Every spa manager in LA should send their staff here for a treatment, because Tomoko is the best of the best—a master class in how to deliver a luxury spa experience. www.tomokospa.com

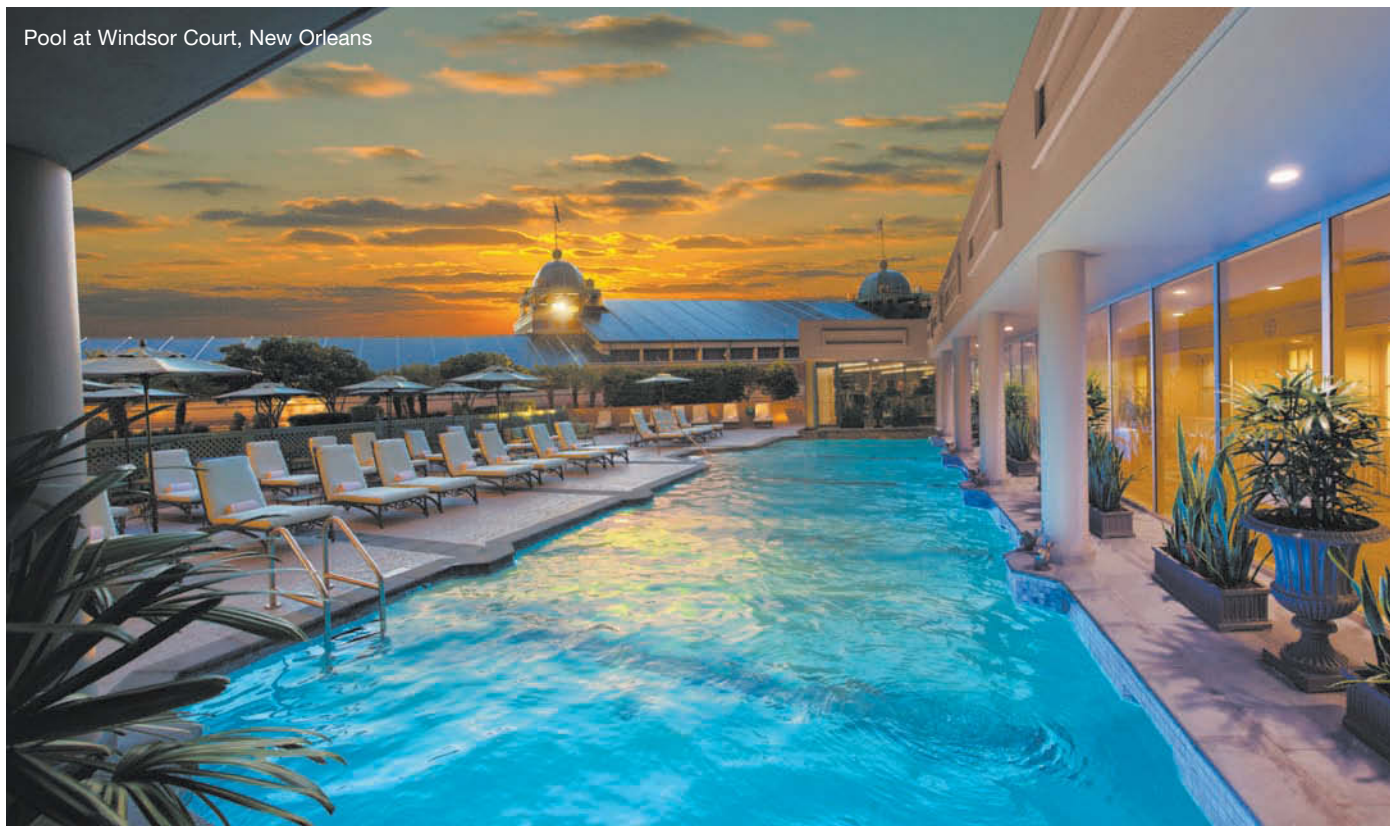
—Paul Horne

MIRAVAL LIFE IN BALANCE SPA MONARCH BEACH RESORT DANA POINT, CALIFORNIA

While Miraval's flagship Arizona property is one of the world's highest-rated destination spas, the brand is less well known in Southern California. That should change soon as the Monarch Beach Resort in Orange County has just opened its newly redesigned and rebranded **Miraval Life in Balance Spa** in Dana Point, California. The 30,000-square-foot spa features 24 treatment rooms, spa suites for couples, a spa boutique, and nail salon, as well as a Miraval Spa Café. The spa brings more than 70 of its signature treatments which incorporate its "Life in Balance" spirit, including fitness and yoga, healthy food options at the resort restaurants, and wellness talks and events. While many LA spa facials use aggressive machines and chemical peels, Miraval takes a gentler, holistic approach with high-end organic lines like ESPA and EmerginC. My entire face felt squeaky clean and almost vibrating after my custom facial (90 min/\$200), and I credit the therapist's technique of massaging my face throughout. Miraval also offers unique fitness options, like Aerial Yoga (\$45) where you're supported by a yoga hammock, or HIIT the Water (\$15), a high-intensity interval training on the beach using shallow ocean water as resistance. A guest in the café raved about the Floating Meditation class (\$45), where guests float weightlessly in a silk hammock while being rocked to the soothing vibrations of crystal bowls (very LA). www.miravalspamonarchbeach.com

—Paul Horne

Pool at Windsor Court, New Orleans



AURORA SPA AT WEST SONOMA INN GUERNEVILLE, CALIFORNIA

Walk from the hotel lobby to **Aurora Spa** at West Sonoma Inn in Guerneville, and you'll be greeted by a view of Korbel's vineyards and looming hills coated in redwood trees. You'll find the same vista in two of the three treatment rooms, where massage choices range from Swedish (120 min/\$205) to Deep Tissue (120 min/\$215), with the option of a Hot River Stone massage for total relaxation (90 min/\$165). Lavender is the key ingredient in a Russian River Exfoliation, combining a salt scrub with application of moisturizing body butter (60 min/\$135). While you're pampering your skin, of special interest are the Sumbody treatments, using products from cleansers to facial masques to toner from this amazing company based in nearby Sebastopol. We suggest the custom-designed Gentleman's Experience (60 min/\$115), designed to match your skin care needs, or perhaps an Age Defying Facial (60 min/\$115). For total indulgence, pair one of the facials with a Swedish Massage (90 min/\$165, 120 min/\$210). As you finish getting rejuvenated, glance up at the verdant hills and the grapevines below. Aren't you glad you came to Russian River? www.westsonomainn.com

—Rich Rubin

THE PEARL LAGUNA LAGUNA BEACH, CALIFORNIA

Laguna Beach is known for its art festivals, beautiful beaches, and a city council so willing to encourage a healthy lifestyle it has banned smoking anywhere within the city limits (we're talking a \$500 fine even for smoking outside on the sidewalk). So this California beach community was the perfect spot for a recent detox vacation, and **The Pearl Laguna** delivered with a luxurious week-long program of hiking, yoga, and expertly prepared vegetarian cuisine (\$5,250 per week all-inclusive). The property has gone through a transformation of its own, as it was formerly a Hell's Angels compound before the current owners, yoga teacher and married couple Geo and Katresha Moskios turned it into a 12-bed-

room luxury bootcamp. What makes the Pearl stand out from similar retreats is the size—only eight to 12 other participants stay in the shared home at a time. The staff, including a chef, hiking guides, and house managers are all extremely attentive (and I'd be remiss to not mention gorgeous), which made that gentle 6 A.M. wake-up knock on the door less awful. Days follow a consistent schedule: wake-up for hot water and lemon, morning yoga, breakfast of poached fruit with yogurt and nuts, a three-hour hike through the gorgeous Laguna canyon, return home to a freshly made juice, then a quick group workout in the gym or pool, followed by lunch. A massage is included every day after lunch, along with a few hours to relax or nap before an evening yoga class, followed by dinner. Most guests collapse in bed by 10 P.M., so they can start again fresh the next morning. All body types, and all levels of hiking and yoga ability are accommodated, and the most challenging part of the Pearl for most guests is the detox, which encourages guests to refrain from alcohol, coffee, sugar, and processed food for a few weeks before your arrival, as none are served on site. Unsurprisingly, I quickly got used to living with my own chef and yoga instructors in a luxurious stone mansion, and I left the Pearl seven pounds lighter with a daily exercise habit I'm happy to keep. www.thepearllaguna.com

—Paul Horne

THE SPA AT FOUR SEASONS DENVER DENVER, COLORADO

Four Seasons Denver has "good energy," which is actually quite infectious, and much of this has to do with the service. It's obvious, the staff is happy to work here, which helps create a wonderful ambience and a truly memorable stay. **The Spa at Four Seasons Denver** is an integral part of this experience. This sanctuary pulls inspiration from an abundance of the surrounding, Colorado nature, as well as holistic philosophies. Before my spa journey, I spent time chilling out at the outdoor pool oasis, and it would be wrong not to point out Four Seasons Denver has one of the best hotel gyms in America. The 24-hour, 2,354-square-foot fitness center is large for a city hotel, and it went through a major remodel with brand-new equipment and Queenax Functional Training Room (think Crossfit equipment like punching bags and battle ropes). A true highlight is the addition of Doug Graham as a personal trainer and group fitness instructor.

Dough has trained the Minnesota Timberwolves and Minnesota Vikings, so you know you'll have a legit one-on-one session. But back to the amazing urban retreat. There are ten treatment rooms, salon, nail services, and separate relaxation lounges and facilities for men and women, decked out in wood and stone, which brings an element of nature indoors. The men's area (maintained by a male spa attendant) was equipped with the works, including an aromatherapy steam room, a hot tub, and a relaxation area. Because the spa recently introduced acupuncture, I gave it a shot (also, it had been a while since I've been pinned). For the Five Element Acupuncture (80 min/\$225), my acupuncturist and I engaged in a solid consultation where she explained how acupuncture works, what I should expect, and a series of questions that would help target problem areas. She definitely had a "one with nature" sensibility (OK, sure, she was a little New Age/bohemian in that Boulder way, which I loved as it only made me feel more comfortable with her encyclopedic knowledge of Eastern medicine). I also indulged in a deep-tissue massage (50 min/\$140). I say "indulge" specifically because it was a euphoric moment, the pressure from the therapist so deep that I was fully knackered afterward, with all the tense areas totally fixed. The spa was so next-level (and effortlessly full of "good energy") that I made time to visit every day. www.fourseasons.com/denver

—Jimmy Im

SPA AT WINDSOR COURT NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

Windsor Court *feels* like it's steeped in centuries-old history (not uncommon for New Orleans). The AAA Four-Diamond hotel is sophisticated and timeless, with European antiques and a wealth of original, period paintings, sculptures, and tapestries that value more than \$8 million. But the hotel didn't age into its elegance (it's not even a decade old), and therein lies the magic. Windsor Court perfectly creates an old-world allure and merges it with modern, highbrow com-

forts (heavy on English/Victorian sensibility), though the spa is in a whole world of its own. The 4,500-square-foot, **Spa at Windsor Court** doesn't transport you to another era, but into a swank, contemporary cocoon of wellness. It's a sanctuary where intimacy is appreciated, with a modest reception area designed with a huge budget. Swarovski crystals line the ceiling, and mother-of-pearl tiles add a glimmer. The spa attendants are warm, and they whisk you into the spa facilities, where you'll need time to take advantage of the separate men/women's areas with sauna and steam room. Also, guests have access to the outdoor pool, which I enjoyed before my appointment. My therapist was intuitive for my Deep-Tissue Massage (80 min/\$210) and truly provided the deep pressure I requested. I went on to get a Natura Bisse Diamond White Facial (80 min/\$295). Natura Bisse, a high-end product line based out of Spain, has been dominating the luxury hotel spa market, and I'm a fan. Their products are expensive, which actually justifies the facial, especially when Windsor Court goes the extra step here with hand/arm massage, aroma nectar body alignment, triple exfoliation, firming mask, and LED light therapy. The two intensive concentrate treatments are meant to help brighten and even out skin tone, and it definitely shows results right away. www.windsorcourthotel.com

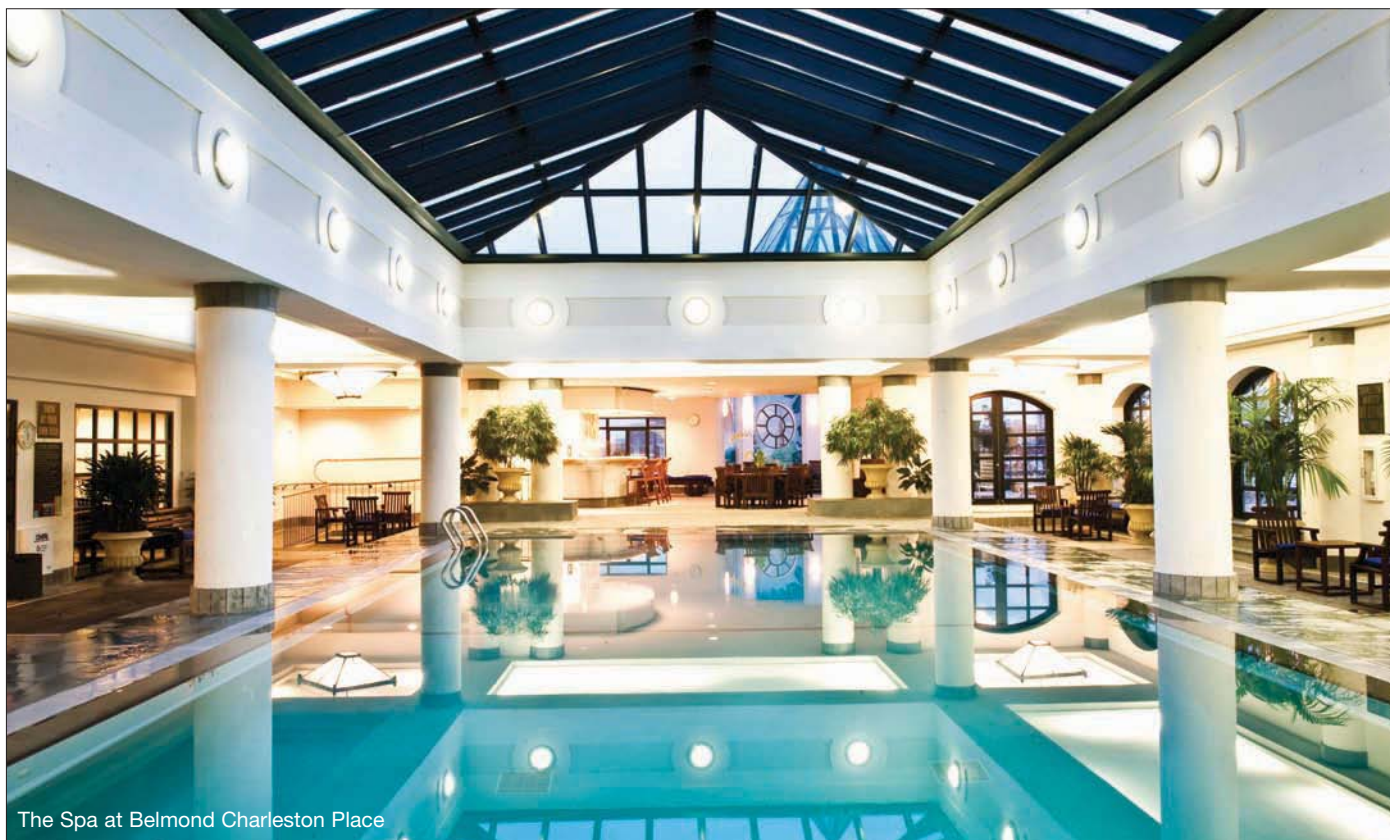
—Jimmy Im

THE SPA AT FOUR SEASONS DOWNTOWN NEW YORK NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Good things come to those who wait, like **Four Seasons Downtown New York**, a hotel that was 16 years in the making. Just steps from the World Trade Center, it's the second Manhattan location for the brand. Taking over the first 24 floors of an 84-story building, the property feels geared more toward business travelers and, if that's the reality, there's good reason why these business travelers should skip out on all their meetings. The spa here is one of the best in New York City,



Sun Terrace at the Peninsula New York



The Spa at Belmond Charleston Place

an urban retreat so pampering that you won't want to leave. The spa reception has a range of imported spa products, and the spa itself has a thoughtful, art-centric, whimsical design with curved walls, engaging art pieces, cream marble mosaics, paper art, tree-trunk tables, mother of pearl everywhere, and high ceilings. The 75-foot, indoor, heated lap pool is now one of the largest hotel pools in Manhattan. If you come during the day, the tranquil sanctuary is perfectly lit with natural sunlight from windows. The men's facility is forward thinking in design, anchored by a central steam room with curved marble walls that dictate the flow of the space. To be the best, you have to offer the best, and the treatment menu features high-end Dr. Burgener Switzerland skincare products (its debut in the United States) and Omorovicza of Hungary treatments where one can splurge on a green-caviar facial that starts at \$340 (you won't find this anywhere else in NYC). During this visit, I enjoyed a deep-tissue massage (50 min/\$225) in a gorgeous, calming treatment room from a male masseur who hit all the right spots. Afterward, I topped it off with a manicure (45 min/\$50) in the salon. www.fourseasons.com/newyorkdowntown

—Jimmy Im

THE SPA AT THE PENINSULA NEW YORK NEW YORK, NEW YORK

It's a certain kind of luxury that greets guests as the elevator door opens onto the 21st floor to **The Spa at The Peninsula New York**. Staff welcomes you in a large, dark-wood atrium that brings about a much-needed mute to NYC life. Come early for a swim in one of the few indoor pools high in the sky, or take a steam, sauna, or just relax on the Sun Lounge. With only ten treatment rooms, you can expect a customized and intimate experience. My therapist Lomis is a treasure, and she walks me through the MBR (Medical Beauty Research) treatment that uses the MBR skincare products developed in Germany. These products work on a cellular level down to the dermal layer. The Customized MBR Facial (60 min/\$360), Lomis tells me, is "the best available," and expresses her jealousy over my use of these coveted cosmetics. "They are free of mineral oil, parabens, PEG, phthalates, and

artificial fragrances." This treatment works in multiple layers: Open (cleanse and enzyme peel), Treat (stimulate the dermis and epidermis for increased collagen production), and Close (seal ingredients in the skin to maximize resiliency). When Lomis finds out that it is my birthday the following day, she carefully leads me out of the treatment room into a relaxation area where she brings in a bottle of Champagne. Now, this is true five-star spa experience www.newyork.peninsula.com

—Joseph Pedro

THE SPA AT BELMOND CHARLESTON PLACE CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

In the Southern tradition of hospitality and grace, meet the **Spa at Belmond Charleston Place**. The hotel itself offers a perfect central location and comfortable, grand décor, but inside is a polished haven of relaxation. The sprawling spa recently underwent major renovations that spruced up its pool and Jacuzzi, topped by a retractable glass roof. Just outside its doors is a rooftop patio with lounge chairs and bar, a dreamy spot to unwind before or after a treatment. The LGBT-friendly Belmond brand has long made its spas a main attraction for guests, with an extensive selection of treatments. Men have an especially robust choice of facial, massage, waxing, and hand and foot services, like the peppermint-extract Relaxing Body Scrub for Men and half-hour massage (50 min/\$165); Total Detox for Men full seaweed wrap (50 min/\$165); or the Time Out Facial for Men anti-aging treatment (80 min/\$250). Bodywork is top of the list here, so consider a "Together" massage with your mate using Warm Stone (80 min/\$500) or a simple Swedish (50 min/\$280, 100 min/\$550). Scrubs, Moroccan oil, Champagne, and several more skin and muscle therapies may prove tempting enough that you'd be wise to select a spa package. Try the Perfect Mini Get-Away (180 min/\$295) for a facial, Swedish massage, and pedicure; or perhaps the Aqua Man (150 min/\$290) treatment trio that includes a relaxing body scrub, skin cleansing "oil-change facial," and "man-I-cure" for trimmed and well-buffed fingertips. www.belmond.com/charleston-place

—Kelsy Chauvin