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THE SPA ISSUE!





THE WORLD'S MOST SENSATIONAL 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

THE SPA, MANDARIN ORIENTAL HYDE PARK LONDON, ENGLAND

The five-star, 169-room **Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park** has a history that dates back to the late 1800s, yet its classic, stately Edwardian exterior houses thoroughly 21st-century luxuries and East-meets-West design. Exemplifying this is **The Spa**, one of the city's finest pampering spots. Those scheduled for treatments in one of its eight treatment rooms (all with private showers) are encouraged to arrive 45 minutes early, to make use of the two-floor spa's ultra-modern, visually cinematic facilities, including a 17-meter indoor pool, male and female samarium saunas, mineral water vitality pool with hydrotherapy jets, amethyst crystal steam room, and a Zen color therapy relaxation area. The treatment menu is extensive, utilizing products from the UK's own Aromatherapy Associates line, and I honed in on its five "Gentlemen Essentials" offerings. The Mandarin's bespoke, signature Time Rituals option, a sort of tailor-made choose your own adventure, is offered here as Time For Men (110 min/\$410). Since the weather had been dry, I was most drawn to the Customized Aromatherapy Facial (50 min/\$211), Utopia Advanced Anti-Aging Facial (80 min/\$288) with Gaylia Kristensen products, and Men's Essential facial (50 min/\$211). I opted for the latter, and my face was expertly cleansed and moisturized as I sunk into a heated bed. Afterward, I zipped off to meet a friend for afternoon tea, and upon arriving my friend immediately commented, unprompted mind you, on how well-rested and vibrant I looked. www.mandarinoriental.com

—Lawrence Ferber

COMPTOIRE DE L'HOMME PARIS, FRANCE

Made by men, specifically for men, the **Comptoire de l'Homme** customizes their treatments to your preferences and skin type. The founders,

Sebastien Lebeau and Charles Borniche, began selling men's cosmetics in 2005, and opened the male-only spa in 2010. Their wide range of products and treatments include a 30-minute express facial for €50 that cleans and hydrates your skin, and a 3.5-hour full-body treatment for €280 that is a dream come true—it offers a relaxing and hydrating treatment from head to toe, complete with a facial, body massage, manicure, and pedicure. Priscille, their most popular esthetician, is particularly experienced, and booked months in advance. Inside the private rooms, northern European wood overlays southern European mosaics. Mario Salgado, the architect, renovated the former St. Germain arched cave in a way that is masculine and welcoming. After your treatment, indulge in a cup of coffee or a glass of wine at the nearby Café de Flore or Les Deux Magots, to taste a slice of Paris in the 1940s, and to join the ranks of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. www.comptoirdelhomme.com/Boutique.

—Allister Chang

GUERLAIN SPA, SAINT JAMES PARIS PARIS, FRANCE

The **Guerlain Spa** at the **Saint James Paris** is an exquisite, whimsical, if not borderline spiritual experience. The space itself is formidable. Once the residence of Napoleon III, the 19th-century country-style château was renovated by Bambi Sloan to become a sophisticated bazaar of color and detail—resulting in extravagant eccentricity. The hotel is located in the calm 16th district, near the Arc de Triomphe and the Champs Elysées. Their exclusive Guerlain treatments customized for men include a Skin-Saver Facial (60 min/€215) with exfoliations, masks, massages, and eye treatments, as well as manicures and pedicures for men (30 min/€115 each). On Sundays, they offer a special two-hour face and body treatment (90 min/€310) that includes a brunch at the hotel restaurant by Chef Virginie Basselot, who just recently received a Michelin star. All treatments also include a free drink at the library-bar of the private Saint James Club. www.saint-james-paris.com

—Allister Chang

HOTEL ADLON KEMPINSKI BERLIN BERLIN, GERMANY

Considering the wealth of celebrities that walk through the doors of the spa at the **Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin**, you would think they could host the Berlinale right on site. The 3,000-square-foot, tri-level spa has won over dignitaries, politicians, and celebrities since opening in 2007. The spa desk might not give any initial impression of an over-the-top, ultra-glam sanctuary but allow the spa attendant to walk you down the stairs and into an elegant setting that's both grand and modern with textured marble tiles, whitewashed oak walls, high ceilings and plenty of good energy for proper Zen. If you're booking a treatment, you might as well splurge and get pampered in one of several signature spa suites that come equipped with a Finnish sauna, steam room, whirlpool, and fireplace. The spa embraces a holistic theme, with mostly East Asian influence for massages. Interestingly you can choose less obvious techniques like Balinese and Indian Head Massage, though I opted for the Thai massage (90 min/\$190) courtesy of Vijay, the hotel's jack-of-all-trades energy therapist/masseuse/yoga instructor, which is exactly what the doctor ordered after the long flight from Los Angeles. Vijay then took me to a whole other state of mind with the interesting sound healing therapy (60 min/\$130), a sound vibration massage conducted with special bowls that was effortlessly meditative. It helped me realign my thoughts and wishes and also to remember that, with the stresses that come with every day life, it's important to regularly step back and take a breath. Sure, I got incredibly wasted at the gay bars later that night, but every time I returned to the hotel I instantly remembered the sound therapy, setting me back in meditation mode. It's a treatment that goes beyond "quick-fix." www.kempinski.com

—Jimmy Im

CORALLIUM SPA, LOPESAN COSTA MELONERAS RESORT, SPA & CASINO MELONERAS, GRAN CANARIA, SPAIN

On the southern tip of the Spanish island of Gran Canaria, next to the Maspalomas lighthouse and the famous Dunas de Maspalomas nature reserve, is the expansive four-star **Lopesan Costa Meloneras Resort, Spa, and Casino** with 1,136 guestrooms, four huge swimming pools, and 13 restaurants and bars. The hotel's **Corallium Spa** is on an equally epic scale. Occupying over 37,000 square feet, the concept is to take customers on a global journey, from the freezing North Pole to the simmering heat of Africa and the Arabian world. Temperatures in the hydrotherapy circuit range from 34°F in the ice igloo to 113°F in the steam baths—but temperature variations aren't all you'll experience, because the entire space is a visual and sensual delight. Created using bricks of crystallized Himalaya salt, the spas Himalaya salt grotto is a natural ionizer that absorbs excessive electromagnetic waves. These crystallized salt bricks have a high bio-energy value and create a microclimate within the grotto. Inhaling the grotto's mineral-rich air is particularly beneficial for sufferers of asthma, migraines, upper respiratory problems or sleep disorders, but its magical amber glow is sure to warm the hearts of every spa visitor. Inspired by the island's volcanic topography, the Lava floatation room features a pool with a high salt and magnesium content, so you float weightlessly while gazing up at the raw, cave-like ceiling. Another imaginative place to relax is the Zodiac room, a circular chamber with waterbeds draped in Bedouin curtains—and this is just a part of the journey. A four-hour Spa Experience is €35 for hotel guests (€39 for non-guests), plus there's a menu of extras like massages, facials, and body treatments (prices from €40 for a 30 min Turkish Soap Massage). www.lopesan.com

—Stuart Haggas

SOFÍA SPA, AVENIDA SOFÍA HOTEL & SPA SITGES, SPAIN

The fabulous four-star **Avenida Sofia Hotel & Spa** with eco-friendly credentials has recently opened in the lovely seaside town of Sitges—yet another reason to visit this popular gay destination, just 40 minutes from Barcelona. Occupying the basement level of this brand-new construction, the **Sofia Spa** features vast picture

windows that overlook exotic subterranean gardens. The space is illuminated with dazzling backlit visuals and vibrant flashes of neon, giving it the ambience of a VIP nightclub. This is not a case of hot style over holistic substance, because the spa complements its flashy looks with the very latest facilities. The hydrotherapy circuit includes Finnish-style sauna, steam bath, sensation shower, frigidarium, and heated easy chairs. A saline hydrolysis system combines water and salt with environmentally friendly products to purify the swimming pool and hot tub. There's also a room dedicated to Oxygen Therapy, to refresh and revitalize the body with the purest air possible. The small gym has the latest Technogym machines and is open 24/7 so you can maintain your fitness regime at your convenience, without impacting your beach or party time. Spa treatments use natural products of marine or vegetable origin and, for an all-round holistic experience, the spa team can advise on nutrition with customized diets and supplements. It's the first hotel in Europe to have received the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum certificate by the US Green Building Council, so it's good for us and for the planet. www.hotelavendasofia.com

—Stuart Haggas

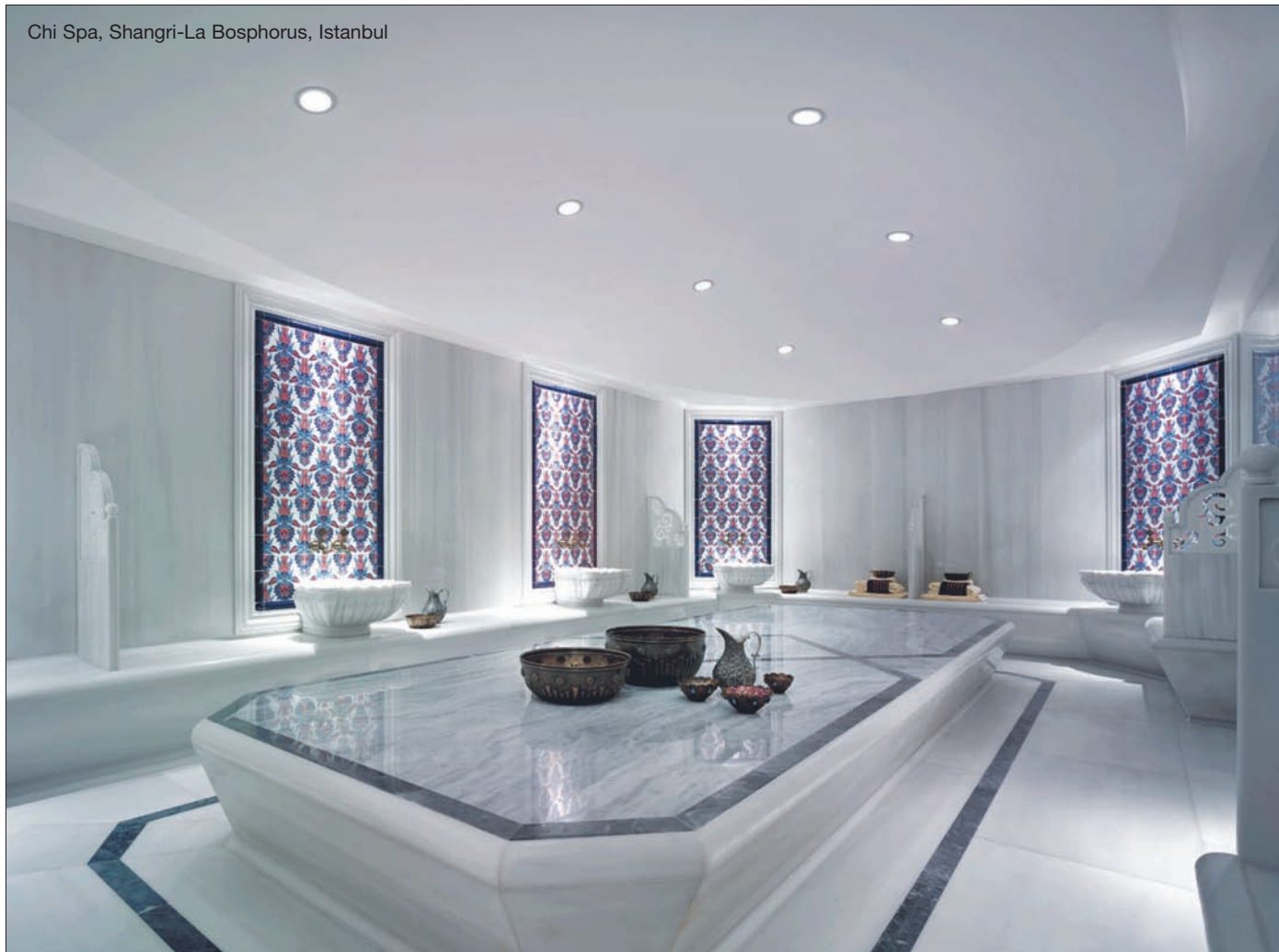
CHI SPA, THE SHANGRI-LA BOSPHORUS ISTANBUL, TURKEY

Visiting Turkey without trying a hammam is akin to bypassing a kebab stand. It's a sin to skip either. To discover the methods ancient Ottoman and Turkish societies used to purify the body, head to one of the many hammams that dot this exotic city. But all hammams aren't built alike, that's why I chose the **Chi Spa** at the Shangri-La Bosphorus. Their replication of the 16th-century domed bathing house has an old-school feel, yet the gleaming blue marble and pristine steam room ensures a luxury experience. The Traditional Hammam Treatment (45min/\$90) begins with a pore-opening, skin-softening sauna. Keep in mind, there's an option to wear a swimsuit, but don't be surprised to see women or men in the buff. Shyness may overcome you for a second, but soon it becomes apparent no one's staring at you, as they are engulfed in a personal nirvana. Besides, those clothes will soon become cumbersome. Next is a wash, followed



The Spa, Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park

Chi Spa, Shangri-La Bosphorus, Istanbul



by a body scrub using a thick rubber glove in water that's at least 80 degrees. One then lies down on a heated marble slab called a *gobek tashi* to release muscle tension, and your therapist uses a pumice stone to exfoliate your feet. This stone beats anything Dr. Scholl's has on the market, and your heels are left silky soft. The finale is the famous Turkish massage, which has left many a lady limp. The hammam ritual is so therapeutic, it's said to be a spiritual experience. You could stop there, but another of the spa's specialties is the Amethyst Wrap With Kundalini Back Massage (120 min/\$175). Rarely does a treatment specifically concentrate on the back, and this one is tops right after a long-haul flight. Your back is scrubbed with iLa brand's Himalayan rock salt mixed with kundalini oil. While a soothing mantra is being repeated through the spa room's speakers, your therapist moves her hands over your back to release toxins. The salt's texture is quite gritty, so this isn't some foo-foo-lah deal, yet, it's not painful either. A back massage follows, which combines strokes tuned to the repetitive mantra, which drew me into such a sound sleep, I didn't hear the chime signaling the treatment completion. My therapist Jhem giggled when I apologized for snoring, but truthfully, I wasn't sorry, floating to the relaxation room lighter than a feather. www.shangri-la.com/istanbul

—Chanize Thorpe

MARINE SPA, THE ST DAVID'S HOTEL AND SPA CARDIFF, WALES

The Marine Spa in the sleek-white The St David's Hotel and Spa, Cardiff's singular five-star option, is an ideal spot for pampering and for celebrity spotting. The BBC films many of their network TV dramas, including *Doctor Who*

and *Sherlock*, at nearby BBC Broadcasting House, and guest stars enjoy the array of treatments at this luxury hotel spa. It's also the preferred hotel of international stars like Madonna and Kylie when they're in Cardiff to perform live at the city's Millennium Stadium. *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood* actor John Barrowman is another regular guest—he and husband Scott Gill had their civil partnership ceremony at the hotel in 2006. But the real reason why this is often listed as one of the UK's top-five spas is because of its excellent amenities and treatments, not because of whom you might spot here in a towel! From the indoor swimming pool and hydrotherapy circuit with swan-neck massage fountains you can enjoy stunning views across Cardiff Bay. There's also a relaxation lounge and juice bar. Several of the spa packages are designed especially for guys, such as the 'Take It Easy' men's spa day. This includes a stress-relieving massage and marine-mud treatment, a purifying E'spa rehydrator facial, and a healthy lunch, all for \$190. Another package is tailored to the specific needs of grooms, including a manicure to ensure fingers look worthy of wedding rings. Spa access from \$42, male treatments from \$75. www.thestdavidshotel.com

—Stuart Haggas

ASIA

MULIA SPA, MULIA RESORT AND VILLAS NUSA DUA, BALI

Bali's Nusa Dua region continues to swell with international attention, particularly with last year's opening of the The Mulia. Sprawling a staggering 80 acres for a considerably small beach town, The Mulia is actual-



Away Spa, W Seoul

ly three high-end resorts within one complex, sharing 11 pools, four restaurants, and a very secluded beach. Equally impressive is the **Mulia Spa**, a massive sanctuary that's making headlines with its unique amenities. The entrance, flanked by two reflection pools and oversized lanterns, warmly invites guests with a wall-size painting by a local artist rather than a front desk. Under a domed ceiling, guests receive consultations on cozy sofas in a minimalist lounge. Before I even began my spa services, I decompressed in the Wellness Suite equipped with a mood-lighting Finnish wood sauna, Bali's first and only Ice Fountain Room for chromatherapy chakra cleansing, and an ultra-sensory high-tech steam room with an electronic system (at the touch of a button, you can play music, choose lightning according to moods, and even have a breeze). This spa (more like an iSpa) was no joke. The outdoor hydrotherapy circuit under palms got me properly melted before my Balinese massage (60 min/\$95). It was so knacker, I fell asleep (a good sign!). Even more de-stressing was the Ayurvedic Shirodhara (80 min/\$135). After a questionnaire, my dosha was matched to a specific warm oil that continuously poured on my "third eye," which invigorates the senses and mind and calms the central nervous system. This was all topped off with the luxurious mani/pedi (120 min/\$65). Using O.P.I products, my hands and feet received the treatment most facials do with scrubs and a mask. Visitors take advantage of the Wellness Signature packages that not only bundle popular treatments, but also include a wealth of additional amenities and perks, like access to the spa's Wellness Suite. www.themulia.com

—Jimmy Im

AWAY SPA, W SEOUL WALKERHILL SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

The name of W Seoul's spa, **AWAY**, is most apt. Nestled against Mount Acha to the city's outskirts, overlooking the Han River, this is a bona fide getaway. At the same time, **W Seoul** represents a hive of contemporary, retro-futuristic cool, clubby vibes, and epitomizes South Korea's love of modern design and art. The hotel shop, featuring local design products like an umbrella with a cupholder, is a must, while the lobby's interactive wall, which moves as you do, is tough to miss (and you shouldn't!). Spas, or *jjimjilbang*, are incredibly popular in South Korea, boasting gender-segregated, nudity-mandatory bathing areas with hydrotherapy tubs of varying temperatures. W's **WATER Zone**, also divided by gender, glams up the concept and takes children out of the equation to boot. While *jjimjilbang* tend to be family affairs, with fathers scrubbing down their male children and vice-versa, one must be over 16 to access these spa areas. Admittedly, the tall Korean eye candy soaking next to me, taking in the hot bubbly water, cool fresh air, and the Han River, was as captivating as anything else about the experience. Not a fan of being naked, or more specifically, naked on an outdoor balcony? A stunning indoor pool (co-ed, and clothed) features some fabulous views and recliners. Of course, treatments also set **AWAY** apart. An entire section of the menu, Well-Being, is dedicated to flushing out toxins, and the massage offerings include a Gentleman's Massage (90 min/\$206), which utilizes neem-leaf extract for its detox and moisturizing effects, and, should you want to go local, deep-tissue Korean (60 min/\$157, 90 min/\$216). The comprehensive Well-being Life package (270 min/\$497), available only to overnight guests, includes a health consultation, yoga, personal training, intensive healing facial, Indian head massage, and a meal at W's Tonic restaurant. Incidentally, on a South Korean cultural note, tattoos are often associated with criminal underworld types here and can lead to expulsion from *jjimjilbang*: at **AWAY**, staff will provide patches or swimsuits should you be marked with hand-sized or larger tats. www.wseoul.com

—Lawrence Ferber

CHIVA SOM HUA HIN, THAILAND

Upon checking into **Chiva Som**, one of the world's most renowned health institutes, guests are informed they're restricted from taking photos of the property. Moreover, electronics like iPads and smartphones are forbidden outside the privacy of your own room. The self-contained, 55-room destination spa resort right on the sandy beaches of Hua Hin is known not only for digital detox (you'll be happy you're not checking e-mails/messages every ten minutes), but also health and wellness in general. The spa is a cross between an indulgent hideaway and a smart medical facility, due to its top in-house physicians and consultants. Guests can choose from a variety of 11 themed packages (spa pampering, weight management, yoga for life, etc.) to reach their personal goals. At a minimum, each program includes an initial health consultation, one massage per day, all meals (mostly organic), more than eight daily fitness and leisure activities, entrance to the Water Therapy Suites, and overnight accommodations. I opted for the new Optimal Performance, the program that helps break fitness plateaus and rehabilitates those injured from accidents or illness. Because I weight train and also suffer from two herniated discs from a boat accident, the services couldn't have been more apt. With the package, I received private classes that addressed my injury, including physiotherapy, private core exercise like Pilates, kinesthetic assessment, and neuromuscular activation (all included in the package). Amazingly, I woke up in the mornings without back pain, the first time in a year. But I'm not surprised considering Thailand is a bastion for medical tourism. At Chiva Som, I was able to get a cranial sacral therapy and core synthesis with Pat Thummanond, the only certified cranial sacral therapist in Thailand who is also a "friend of the family." It was interesting to gauge my body's condition from a holistic perspective. If I wasn't getting my back "fixed," you could find me at the yoga pavilion for Ashtanga yoga, the dance studio for chakra cleansing, the heated, saltwater pool for lazing the evenings away and, of



course, at the actual, massive spa with separate men's and women's steam sauna, Jacuzzi, and shower. After all, Chiva Som is not all about healing, but proper decompressing. Minimum length of stay is three nights. Rates at a Thai Pavilion for three nights start at \$2,408 per person. www.chivasom.com

—Jimmy Im

AUSTRALIA/SOUTH PACIFIC

MANDARA SPA

HILTON BORA BORA NUI RESORT & SPA

MOOREA, FRENCH POLYNESIA

When visiting a place like Bora Bora you'll quickly run out of synonyms for blue. Depending on the light, the water switches quickly between shimmering navy, sapphire, azure, lapis, aquamarine, turquoise, teal, and... My traveling buddies and I finally gave up and just blurted out the same thing every ten minutes: "Look at that blue!" It's the blue found in every screensaver and bucket list around the world, but you can't understand blue until you get off the plane on one of the 118 Tahitian islands known as French Polynesia and see *that* water. Bora Bora is one of those islands, and it's comparatively small, just 18 miles in circumference. After an eight-hour flight from LAX to the main island of Tahiti, it's less than an hour's flight to Bora Bora. The **Hilton Bora Bora Nui Resort & Spa** is located on a private island, just a short boat ride from the main island of Bora Bora. It comprises 122 suite-sized villas that pepper the hillside, roll down to the beach, and stretch out across the water to the property's famous overwater bungalows. All suites feature mahogany canopy beds, Italian-marble bathtubs, Peter Thomas Roth bath products, and Wi-Fi, but the overwater bungalows also offer in-floor glass viewing panels, and a private deck with easy access to the water below for a morning swim or paddle-boarding. Guests of the Hilton have exclusive access to a *motu* (tiny island) called *Motu Tapu* for private picnics or special events. There are no physical structures on the motu, save for a few tables and chairs for guests, so it's the ideal place to snorkel, catch some rays, or have a private massage. The Hilton will even set up a table half-submerged in the water for a romantic meal where you can sip wine, dine on lobster and poisson cru, and feed the fish circling your feet. Although just being in Bora Bora is a spa treatment, the Hilton is also home to the 30,000-square-foot **Mandara Spa**, located on the hilltop above the resort. The menu includes island ingredients like coffee, vanilla, ginger, and the famous *monoi* (scented coconut oil) in a selection of Tahitian massage, body scrubs, wraps, and facials. They also tailor treatments to the many visiting couples (I did speak to one gay couple staying at the Hilton who raved about feeling welcome—French Polynesians are known for being open-minded and very gay-friendly). You could request any of the spa massages in your villa, but the best reason to visit Mandara is a treatment called The Million Dollar View Experience (90 min/\$345), performed at the spa in an outdoor pavilion. It begins with an exotic foot bath and body polish, followed by an open-air Tahitian massage. Relax afterward with a cup of tea, and a plate of sashimi and tropical fruit as you take in the jaw-dropping view and contemplate an early retirement. Rates start at \$850 in

low-season, but check the website for specials and opt for meal packages when available. www.hilton.com/frenchpolynesia

—Paul Horne

MOOREA LAGOON SPA

HILTON MOOREA LAGOON RESORT & SPA

MOOREA, FRENCH POLYNESIA

If Bora Bora is Beyoncé you might be tempted to think of Moorea as Solange, the beautiful but lesser-known sister outside the spotlight. But Moorea has its own impressive history as the location for movies like *Mutiny on the Bounty* and *Love Affair*. The heart-shaped island was the backdrop for the legendary paintings of Paul Gauguin, and it is also said to be the inspiration for James Michener's mythical island of *Bali Hai*. Moorea is just ten minutes by plane from Tahiti, or you can opt for the 30-minute high-speed catamaran from Papeete, which is a fun and spectacular way to approach the island. The **Hilton Moorea Lagoon Resort & Spa** is a stunning five-star resort that underwent an \$11 million dollar renovation in 2010. There are 49 garden suites on land, each with a private plunge pool, but the jewels of the resort are the 54 overwater bungalows, which feature luxury amenities and private balconies with direct access to the water below. Each night the Toatea Restaurant & Bar, located among the over-water bungalows, turns on the underwater lights and feeds the reef-tip sharks, so you can dine on sweet or savory crepes above while watching a frenzy of sharks feeding below (don't be afraid, you'll be swimming with those same sharks in the morning). The **Moorea Lagoon Spa** on the property is located beachfront with an emphasis on locally-inspired treatments like the Exotic Body Exfoliation (60 min/\$90). For 25 minutes your entire body is gently scrubbed with papaya, pineapple, coconut powder, and Bora Bora white sand to leave your skin glowing and ready for a Tahitian massage with the island's famous *monon* oil (coconut oil scented with gardenia flowers). Couples can splurge on the Royal Romance Ritual (180 min/\$690 for two), a three-hour treatment that includes a papaya body polish, coconut and vanilla body wrap, Polynesian massage, and a Black Pearl facial. Then you and your partner settle into a flower-filled Jacuzzi with a half-bottle of Champagne and fruit, and do what you came here to do (wait, I just meant relax...). Hilton Moorea starting rates are normally \$740/night (low season) and \$910 (high season), however, for a limited time Moorea is offering an amazing deal: \$2,599 for a six-day package including round-trip flights from LAX, daily breakfast and all ground transport. www.hilton.com/frenchpolynesia

—Paul Horne

CARIBBEAN

YHI SPA, PARADISUS PALMA REAL

PUNTA CANA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

There's not much point in being somewhere like Punta Cana without experiencing the Dominican Republic sun. At **Paradisus Palma Real**, that thinking applies to the alluring **YHI Spa** as well as the resort itself. There's a full-service, traditional spa at their sister property down the beach, Paradisus Punta Cana, and it's a beauty: all potted palms, swirling cream-hued marble, stone urns, Zen-like stone arrangements, and water everywhere. You certainly can't go wrong with any of the luscious treatments offered there. At Palma Real, though, a truly unique experience awaits. Here, you can have the best of both worlds, the same relaxing treatments combined with alfresco pleasure in the Oriental Garden, which just opened last December. You change for your massage and head through a lovely little garden. A wooden boardwalk curves its way through pools where water flows over large white pebbles. A series of cabanas sweeps around the sinuous confines of the garden, and you'll head to one of them for your massage. As soft music plays, you look out of the window to palms and deep blue skies. You can choose a "regular" bio-massage, reflexology, or, in keeping with the Asian theme, a Thai or Balinese massage. Return to the spa headquarters for your water ritual, taking advantage of a series of environments: steam, sauna, hot tub, cold pool. Before you know it, the entire

Paradisus Palma Real



afternoon has gone by as you go from pool to pool, water to water, which surrounds you both scenically and literally, seeping into your newly unknotted body for a full day of relaxation. On your honeymoon? Turn it into a Balimoon: Flower foot Bath and Tea Ceremony, Balinese Massage, Balinese Boreh (a warm, spiced wrap), and an Indian Scalp & Reflexology treatment, all created with couples in mind. Spa treatments range from \$90 for 60-minute reflexology to \$295 per person for a 3.5 hour couple's Balimoon. www.paradisus.com

—Rich Rubin

CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICA

THE SPA, PALACIO DEL INKA CUSCO, PERU

Before 2013, there was no spa in Cusco's **Palacio del Inka**. The Libertador Luxury Collection hotel added the 500-square-meter **The Spa** as part of a sweeping \$15 million dollar renovation that transformed the entire 203-room hotel from a nondescript bore into an opulent Churriguer-esque-styled homage to the royal Incan and then Spanish mansion that once stood on this very spot. So to anyone who's just returned from a strenuous day climbing up and down the (literally) breathtaking stone steps at Machu Picchu, or from bumming around the 11,000-feet-above-sea-level streets of Cusco, the three-step Andean Renewal Treatment (150 min/\$120) at the Palacio del Inka couldn't be more apropos. The first stage is an aqueous half-hour warm up in the thermal circuit where, blue Travertine walls (rock formed by hot springs), varnished tornillo, and heated wood furniture, as well as gold patina doors beneath color-changing LED lights, ease all of your senses into a state of meditative bliss. Then you're taken to a cozy, dimly lit wooden room for the meat and potatoes of the process. Cooked, locally grown quinoa is smeared from toe to torso to moisturize and exfoliate dead skin, a necessary step in Cusco's thin air, which can leave the skin sapped and flakey. After treating your epidermis with a quinoa salad, it's time for a coca-leaf wrap. Yes, they're the

leaves that are also used to produce cocaine. The Inca have long used coca leaves for their medicinal properties; when chewed they help alleviate altitude sickness, and used topically, their high amount of anti-aging minerals and vitamins have the ability to stimulate blood flow. You can feel the tingle even as they are worked over your entire body. With your skin treated and the blood flowing into your muscles, it's time for an hour-long deep-tissue massage to complete the renewal. I sauntered out of the ground-level spa feeling like an Incan prince and topped it off with the perfect pisco sour at the hotel's Rumi Bar (not included in the treatment). www.luxurycollectionspas.com

—Matt Bell

NORTH AMERICA

SPA DU CHÂTEAU FAIRMONT LE CHÂTEAU FRONTENAC QUEBEC CITY, CANADA

As part of an exhaustive, top-to-bottom \$75 million dollar renovation that was completed in June 2014, Quebec City's most iconic, historic property unveiled a trio of fantastic restaurants (notably Chef Stephane Modat's innovative fine dining venue, Champlain), 611 revamped guestrooms in your choice of contemporary or classical château style, and a brand-new in-house spa, **Spa du Château**. Located on the sixth floor adjacent to a 15-meter-long indoor swimming pool and whirlpool, this high-end urban spa's seven treatment rooms entail converted bedrooms, so they're generously proportioned with full bathroom facilities including showers and bathtubs. An additional spa space off the reception area is outfitted for mani-pedi services, and the changing quarters boast steamrooms. All treatments ring in at 50 minutes, although they can be extended to 80 for an additional fee, and utilize either Switzerland's Valmont or France's Sothys products, an exception being the super-regional Elicir Ice Cider Body Wrap (50 min/\$140). While my appointment had been made for a

Relaxing Massage (50 min/\$120), at my male massage therapist's behest I switched it to the Therapeutic Massage (50 min/\$135), which is geared toward undoing knots in the back yet it's not as intense (read: painful) as deep tissue. Nonetheless, an analgesic heat rub provided plenty of loosening burn to my back while he applied soothing strokes to my legs. After that soaked in, he got to work on my back, primarily with thumbs and circular strokes to break down whatever was tight back there. After putting my robe back on, I was escorted to a second treatment room where a female esthetician awaited. My Valmont Signature Facial (50 min/\$140) also incorporated tingling sensations, plus plenty of delicious slippery and silky salve applications and a shoulder massage. My skin absorbed the potent, rejuvenating Valmont products, including an eye collagen serum she informed would continue to produce effects for two weeks. Afterward, I was provided with a list of the products used, and also shown Sothys' men's line of goods, which are used in the Detoxifying Facial for Men (50 min/\$130). Indeed, my dark circles from a bit of sleep deprivation seemed banished; it would seem the Fairmont's renovations also extend to its guests! www.fairmont.com/frontenac-quebec

—Lawrence Ferber

SPA AT FOUR SEASONS TORONTO TORONTO, ONTARIO

Located on the ninth floor, the **Spa at Four Seasons Toronto** stands in stark contrast to the towering, glass, two-year-old hotel. It's an oasis of warmth that feels strikingly intimate despite its 30,000-square-foot size. This should come as no surprise to those who are familiar with the interior designs of gay couple Glenn Pushelberg and George Yabu who have created a richly personal and comforting space that rivals spas in the most secluded regions. I'm welcomed instantly and brought past an exquisite lap pool where a strip of rectangular skylights and cleverly hidden backlights reflect off the water and the moody-blue walls to create a cave-like effect; an enchanting escape found nowhere else in Toronto. I step into the curtain-drawn men's waiting area, get comfortable in the heated spa lounge chairs while sipping my lemon-infused water, and I nod off. Like a mother waking her young child, my facialist, Kathy, taps me so gently that I awake very slowly. "It happens all the time," she says in a comforting whisper to my obvious embarrassment. Kathy is honest and tells me right away what she thinks will work and what won't for my face. I'm getting the Alpha Male Facial (60 min/\$165), and she utilizes her arsenal of Hungarian brand Omorovieza skincare products. Examining her tray of goodies like an artist choosing paint, she carefully decides against the cleansing milk and uses the foam and gentle buffing cleanser. After applying the deep cleansing mask she relaxes me further with a gentle massage. Before I know it, she chimes a bell signaling the end of the treatment. "Do I really have to go back out there?" I moan. "With a face like that," she smiles. "You'll want to get out there. Now, you'll get all the boys." www.fourseasons.com/toronto

—Joseph Pedro

LE BLANC SPA RESORT CANCÚN, MEXICO

You'll want to throw away any preconceived notions, or past experiences, you've had at all-inclusive resorts, because **Le Blanc Spa Resort's** over-the-top luxury, sophisticated style, and all-around sense of true escape makes this the most "I can't believe this is Cancún" hotel in the world-famous resort city. Besides an epic, private beach, two pools where they serve premium cocktails, four high-end restaurants, and spacious rooms complete with balconies, you'll definitely want to book a treatment at their innovative **Spa**. I'm feeling adventurous in Mexico, so I book myself their signature four-handed (two therapist) Kukulkan Massage (60 min/\$290). Water runs under the dark-marble platforms leading to the locker rooms, and I'm ushered into the hydrotherapy area where I take a soothing after-beach shower and then decide to take an oh-so-refreshing cold-pool dip that provides a jolt of energy. Of course, I immediately follow this with a few minutes in the Jacuzzi. The staff is attentive and comes to bring me a fresh

guava juice as I put my feet in the reflexology pool. Soon, though, two delightful women bring me to the massage room and put me at ease by beginning the treatment with a Maya Cleansing Ceremony. Drumbeats in the background make the experience feel otherworldly as my aura is cleansed with a feather and incense. I'm asked to lie down and the women rub oils on my back in unison and begin to massage me emulating different animals. The jaguar lightly pounces to the beats, while the snake slowly slithers up and down my back. They turn me over and shake my arms and legs in unison, and I'm too far down the Zen-filled rabbit hole to feel any discomfort. The ladies end by giving me a traditional Mayan tea and then lead me to a large relaxing corridor. Here, I drift away again back to the comforting beats of Le Blanc's Spa. www.leblancsparesort.com

—Joseph Pedro

OHTLI SPA, CASAMAGNA MARRIOTT PUERTO VALLARTA, MEXICO

If bigger is better, then the **Ohtli Spa** at the **CasaMagna Marriott** is perhaps Puerto Vallarta's very best. Billed as the largest spa in this Mexican beach resort town, Ohtli Spa offers more than 21,500 square feet of relaxation, with a large, dramatic reception area that feels almost like a movie set, thanks to its tall ceilings and beckoning reflecting pool. The CasaMagna Marriott Puerto Vallarta showed its gay-friendly colors when it recently hosted the LGBT Confex, an international tourism and business conference, and surely several delegates made good use of the spa. One of the spa's most interesting features, in addition to the eight treatment cabins, are the four special-themed cabins, each of which is designed for one specific type of treatment. The Thai cabin, for example, is the setting for Thai massages, while the Vichy cabin is where guests can enjoy a relaxing water massage using the gentle jets of the vichy shower. The Iyari Suite is designed for couples' massages, complete with a private whirlpool and shower. And the Janzu cabin features a pool used for a 50 minute/rebirth therapy, a guided program that simulates the movements of your body before birth. Additional therapy options include Sensorial Swedish massage (\$94), a traditional full-body treatment with massage oils; the Rosemary-Peppermint Therapeutic massage (\$94), which aims to stimulate circulation while soothing muscle tissue; and the 50 min/Coco-Lima Effleurage (\$134), a massage treatment that makes use of coconut oils to hydrate and soften skin. Among the more



Photo: Nosvos

mouthwatering options are the Piña-Mango Firming therapy (\$134), which combines the essences of pineapple and mango to create a tightening and toning blend, and the chocolate soak (\$119), which includes a full body chocolate scrub followed by hydrotherapy. Ohtli spa offers an array of specialized treatments for different types of travelers, including programs for kids, teens, and pregnant women. The facility also has a whirlpool, footbath, hot and cold plunge pools, steam room and sauna. A well-equipped gym and indoor swimming pool, which are attached to the spa reception area, provide additional ways to stay in great shape. www.puertovallartamarriott.com

—Mark Chesnut

UNITED STATES

CIEL SPA, SLS BEVERLY HILLS BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA

The Philipp Starck–designed **SLS Beverly Hills** is a preferred stomping ground for the LGBT community, and with good reason. Stylish rooms, the celebrity Chef Jose Andres–helmed restaurant The Bazaar, and even a dedicated gay concierge ensures gays are taken care of, but the **Ciel Spa** and Robert Veticon salon are becoming just as notable. The award-winning, 5,000-square-foot spa is whimsical and sleek, a nice retreat tucked far back on the 2nd floor. After checking in, a spa attendant sets you up in the tranquil relaxation room that serves as the main lounge with plush daybeds, white walls, and curtains that enhance the feeling of spaciousness with a post-modern, heaven-on-a-cloud sort of feeling. There are six treatment rooms equipped with sound therapy massage beds to further shake you down to utter and complete calm. For my full-body Ciel Muscle Refresher massage (60 min/\$175), my therapist with huge hands left me completely knackered, worth every penny for the rub down. To get the full Ciel Spa experience, I got my haircut (\$75) at the Robert Veticon salon by Johnny, who was trained by the celebrity hairdresser himself. www.sls-hotels.com/beverlyhills

—Jimmy Im

DESERT HOT SPRINGS HOTEL & SPA DESERT HOT SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

Searing temperatures aren't the only thing boiling in Palm Springs, so too does the ground. Earth-fed mineral hot springs abound in the Golden State, including at this massive, if a tad retro, hotel and spa in which 50 rooms wrap around a sprawling courtyard that includes eight natural hot mineral water pools of varying temps. You might giggle at first at what a throwback this place is to the desert's midcentury heyday, but if you can get past the kitschy on-site diner and the sprucing up the grounds could use here and there, we promise eight sparkling and spacious pools tucked away under numerous tall and spindly palm trees at the **Desert Hot Springs Hotel and Spa**. Massages (including sports, shiatsu, deep tissue, etc.) and body treatments are plentiful, even exotic. Consider, for example, treating yourself to the art of Hawaiian Lomi Lomi (50 min/\$85, 80 min/\$135) in which practitioners use their palms forearms, fingers, knuckles, elbows, and, in some cases, even their feet to deliver you to a state of bliss. Of course, the cheapest way to take the sting off a cool desert evening is with a visitor's pass (starting at just \$5) that will allow you to rejuvenate without breaking the bank. www.dhsspa.com

—Jason Heidemann

SPA AT THE RITZ-CARLTON, HALF MOON BAY HALF MOON BAY, CALIFORNIA

Diana, the pixie-like Colombian-American therapist assigned to me at the 16,000-square-foot **Spa at The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay**, laughed aloud when I told her I'd never taken a shower horizontally before. "Do you think it's a little weird?" she asked, teasingly, as I settled onto a plastic-covered massage table, my eyes locked on the five-foot pole standing by my feet, its long multi-nozzled arm extending over my body and looking more like dental technology than anything likely to give pleasure. "Don't worry. You're going to feel like a baby." Since this sprawling spa resort is set on a gorgeous stretch of Pacific

beachfront, I'd decided to 'go local' and try a signature Ocean Mist Stone Ritual (\$245/75 min). After I adjusted to the sight of that Vichy shower contraption and the fact that my masseuse would be wearing a black rubber apron (to keep her from getting too wet), my worries were quickly washed away. Diana began with a light-pressured exfoliating sugar scrub, working the grains against my skin in slow circular motions. Then, she turned the shower arm on, releasing seven steady streams of body-temperature water that she swung back and forth several times over my towel-diapered body. Initially, the sensation of laying out in the rain had me reflexively wanting to get up and seek shelter, but I let myself relax into it. With water continuing to drizzle down and my terry loincloth completely soaked through, Diana administered a slippery hot-stone massage, leaving me feeling as I'd had melted into the table. There was plenty of time to reconstitute myself: all treatments at the Ritz-Carlton Half Moon Bay include full-day access to the spa's clothing-optional single-sex soaking tubs, sauna, and steam bath; a candlelit co-ed Roman tub room; and a well-equipped gym with dramatic ocean views. www.ritzcarlton.com/halfmoonbay

—Jim Gladstone

LODGE TORREY PINES RESORT TORREY PINES SPA LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

At home among the rare pines (unique on earth to Torrey State Reserve), **Lodge Torrey Pines Resort** is a tribute to the 1900s arts and crafts movement of Southern California. Located on a bluff above the sandstone cliffs of the Pacific at La Jolla, luxury, nature, artistry, and extreme customer service combine. The spa is only 12 years old, but you think your eyes betray you because it exudes an air of timelessness, tranquility, and an uplifting feng shui energy that's no accident. That air is scented with 17 varieties of sage, lemongrass, wildflowers, and roses: resplendent with California sun and sea. You will be warmly welcomed at the Lodge by a doorman in traditional kilted Scottish dress who will usher you into the grand porte cochère. Come prepared to be charmed and pampered by your gracious staff, whether you've treated yourself to an afternoon, day pass, or are in for a longer, indulgent stay. You've booked yourself a feast for body, mind, soul, and senses. **The Spa** itself is beautiful, pristine, and spacious. The lady's lounge (with fireplace) is done in a shimmering oyster shell and pale pink color palette, appointed with luxe white leather chairs and chaise lounges, delicately displayed orchids and lilies. A separate men's lounge (with TVs) is plush in white, amber, and black, plus the spa's distinctive tree of life motif. Water with apples or lemons sliced thin as lotus petals, a plethora of white towels, slippers and robes, tea, and pearls of honey are placed at your fingertips. If you've chosen the Signature Spa Ritual (140 min/\$295) so named for its beneficial botanical-marine-based products, here is where you begin by basking in sage-infused water, given glasses of ice water and cool compresses for your forehead. Danielle, my lovely therapist, follows this by an exfoliating, coastal sage scrub on the heated treatment table and a vichy water shower. Sweet and patient, she then delivers the Swedish massage (50 min/\$140), melting away every trace of shoulder pain and stress with gifted, skilled hands and grace. Ultimately, I am lavished with sage soufflé cream. Other luxuries include dry sauna, wet, steam, aromatherapy, meditation rooms, and showers, a state-of-the-art fitness center, and group classes (yoga). The Spa menu is so rich in delectable offerings, the only problem you'll encounter is obsessing over perfect choices. Order packages, or à la carte from water therapies, wraps, massages, and facial, hair, and nail therapies. Later you could sip a glass of boutique wine, lunch at the A.R. Valentian on local fare prepared by award-winning Executive Chef Jeff Jackson, or enjoy the terrace overlooking the heated saltwater pool, whirlpool tucked among the pines, California's coastline, and a pastoral view of the world-class golf course. Tee-off, if that's your pleasure, or simply scan the green in hopes of spotting Rory McIlroy, while relishing huevos rancheros at The Grill. Trek down to the sea for a swim: hike, explore the tide pools, and wonder at swooping Osprey. What you will not want to do is leave. When you reluctantly do slip out of the cloud-like bed of your perfectly appointed suite (the angels are in the details), it will be with renewed body, mind, and spirit—the scent of lemongrass, sage and pine, benefi-

cial seaweed, and organic marine botanicals linger long after you return to your nearly forgotten reality with touchable, kissable, sun-warmed skin polished smooth as a beach pebble...until you are compelled to revisit Torrey again and again: a California dream spa. www.spatorreyepines.com

—Annadora Perillo

WI SPA

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

The great thing about a communal spa experience in Los Angeles is that you never know who might be chilling next to you au naturel. At a recent visit, for example, Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist Flea was looking mighty fine as he steamed and soaked in the buff at LA's best Korean bathhouse. Stargazing aside, **Wi Spa** is brilliant in its affordability. A day pass is \$25 and \$30 for with access to the gym. Wet areas are separated by gender where you can chill out in your choice of warm, hot, or cold plunge pools followed by a nice steam. Communal areas include an onsite Korean deli, nail salon, numerous themed saunas (arctic "ice" sauna, anyone?) and, of course, full-service spa treatments including massages, facials, and salt scrubs. Consider flexing and tensing all the muscles you want at their on-site gym, then ducking into a treatment room afterward where a therapist will be waiting to realign your body with two hours of shiatsu (\$110)—a form of massage in which practitioners realign the body through stretching and gentle pressure. You won't be disappointed at Wi Spa—especially if you're lucky enough to spot a nude celeb. www.wispausa.com

—Jason Heidemann

ZAZEN

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Ever since I saw Director Ken Russell's sci-fi horror film *Altered States* at the impressionable age of 15, I wanted to experience a sensory deprivation tank. Admittedly, that yearning may have had some connection with the film's showcasing of a dripping-wet, bare-butt young William Hurt. Even so, when I learned that San Francisco's 70s throwback **Zazen** offers tank "floats" in addition to massages, acupuncture, yoga, and meditation sessions, I was eager to take the plunge. Actually, the isolation tank experience is a non-plunge—you lay effortlessly atop 200 gallons of water loaded with Epsom salts in a completely light- and sound-proofed chamber. Getting in felt like locking myself into a dark, damp bank vault, but once I relaxed and stabilized my floating body so my hands and feet didn't bump against the side walls, the space began to feel incredibly vast, as if I were adrift on a calm sea with no breeze in the air and no land for miles. The water is kept at 95 degrees, the same temperature as human skin, so even the barrier between my body and the water seemed to dissolve eventually, leaving me in a remarkable realm of meditative abstraction. Time, too, becomes elusive: over the course of my allotted hour, I regularly wondered whether I'd been adrift for mere minutes, or perhaps had fallen asleep and been forgotten by the Zazen staff overnight. Zazen frequently offers discounts through online services including Groupon: I signed up for a one-hour massage followed by a one-hour float, a fantastic value at \$90 (Regular price \$175). The facility has a simple, stripped-down Buddhist-influenced interior with no luxe accoutrements, but the staff consists of earnest believers in the healing arts, attentive during massages and reassuring as you enter the mysterious darkness of the isolation tank. www.zazensf.com

—Jim Gladstone

CASA MADRONA HOTEL AND SPA SAUSALITO, CALIFORNIA

Theory has it that "the journey is just as important as the destination," and it's hard to imagine more pleasant proof than a visit to the **Casa Madrona Spa** in the bayside community of Sausalito, just outside of San Francisco. The most convenient way to reach the spa from the city is by boat: there are Sausalito departures approximately once an hour from a dock behind the famous Ferry Building Farmer's Market, and the salt air, sunshine, and spectacular views of

the city skyline and Golden Gate Bridge receding behind you will set your mind adrift, getting you relaxed and ready for the treatment to follow. After the 30-minute ride, walk just two minutes from the ferry dock in Sausalito, and you've arrived in the pampering hands of the Casa Madrona staff. The modest storefront street entrance doesn't prepare you for the luxurious expanse of the 2014-renovated hotel, with grounds that climb a high hillside and are capped by Madrona's namesake 1885 mansion. The Casa Madrona Spa experience begins with indoor and outdoor lounge areas, the inside space reflecting the bayside locale with its light maritime motif: white daybeds, blue-and-white striped pillows, and cozy blue blankets ideal for an afternoon catnap. On a recent visit, my therapist, Marta, from Kenya, administered Madrona's specialty Solar Flare treatment (60 min/\$105), a full-body sugar scrub, followed by an aromatic head-to-toe slathering of lemon oil infused shea butter and energy point facial massage; the bright citrus scent had an almost drug-like mood-enhancing effect, making me cheerful even as I drowsed in relaxation. Other Madrona specialties include a moisture replenishing Sea Pearl Comfort Facial (60 min/\$105), and the Triton's Facial for Men (100 min/\$105). Treatment packages including alfresco lunches begin at under \$200. Finish up with a sauna, a steam, and, if you're not checking in for the evening, let the bliss sink in on your return trip ferry back to the city. www.casamadrona.com

—Jim Gladstone

KENWOOD INN & SPA SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Normally, July in the California's wine country is reliably toasty, but as we drove through the oak-covered hills and orchards of the legendary, and lovely named, Valley of the Moon, moody skies threatened, and when we pulled up at **Kenwood Inn & Spa** rain splattered the windshield. Preferring cool, I was pleased, though my friend, David, grouched about the nixed tanning time by the saline swimming pool and large outdoor saline Jacuzzi with fantastically powerful jets. (Luckily for David, the sun did emerge the following day.) Designed to evoke a Tuscan village (there's even an old mill water-wheel in a koi pond), the hotel's grounds have winding flagstone paths and courtyards lush with fragrant star jasmine, rose bushes, and numerous bubbling fountains. Kenwood's 29 rooms and suites offer Italian linens, plush feather beds, and gas fireplaces; we kept ours blazing most of the stay. Two touches that I fully appreciated were: no children under 18 and no televisions in the rooms. Many contemporary spas lean toward spare, Zen aesthetics, while Kenwood, featuring Caudalie, Intracuticals, and iS clinical products, masquerades as a richly decorated Italian villa with a cozy fireplace to curl up by. In the lounge I helped myself to complimentary tea, nuts, an apples, and chocolate-dipped biscotti before heading upstairs. I'd never seen anything like this: ensconced in a tower pergola with a 360-degree view of the vineyard-covered hill awaited a spacious Jacuzzi tub that I soaked in for twenty minutes before my treatment. From among the many wonderful spa menu options I chose the Kenwood Hot Stone Massage (75 min/\$190). My practitioner Lillian was warm and friendly (initially we chatted away like long-lost friends; later I slipped into relaxed, mum bliss). She used the heated river stones of various sizes to massage my body, sometime employing the stone's edge to probe deeper, the heat penetrating the muscles. After working on my feet, she inserted heated pebbles between each toe, and the warm stones placed on my sternum and stomach were amazingly comforting. The treatment included touches of warm towels, heated pads, and lavender eye shades, refining an already fine experience. A special offer for Bay Area residents (California state ID or proof of residence required) offer a 20% discount on spa treatments Sunday-Thursday. In the morning, the delicious breakfast buffet in the fountain courtyard offered home-made pastries and granola, fresh juices and fruit, bagels and lox, and cooked-to-order poached eggs and omelets. www.kenwoodinn.com

—Bill Strubbe

BLISS SPA, W FORT LAUDERDALE FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

When you need to unwind in Fort Lauderdale, head to **Bliss Spa** at the trendy W Fort Lauderdale. Bliss offers a hip, flirty, and quirky approach to beauty, grooming, and wellness through its services and product line. Located on the third floor of W, my first stop at the spa is to the nail salon. The Sole Man Pedicure (60 min/\$55) includes a soaking, de-roughing, clipping, trimming, and buffing, and the Manly-cure (30 min/\$25) features a hot cream hand massage, cuticle-sprucing, buffing, and nail shaping. While you wait and during your nail service, there's a snack bar filled with olives, cheese, water, tea, and Bliss' well-known brownie buffet. The locker rooms offer guests a chance to try out various Bliss products on their own, and the lounge areas open to an outdoor terrace, which is perfect if you want to spend time laying outside in a relaxing setting. Treatments include Bliss' signature Blissage 75 (75 min/\$160) that includes a warm-wax foot wrap and a relaxing rubdown designed to loosen you up by targeting troubled muscles. A more whimsically named treatment is The Youth As We Know It (60 min/\$195), a face service that targets fine lines and wrinkles with a gentle peel and a high-tech collagen mask. Whatever your need, maybe you'll find your bliss here. www.wfortlauderdalehotel.com

—Andrew Villagomez

AWILI SPA, ANDAZ MAUI AT WAILEA RESORT MAUI, HAWAII

The adults-only **Awili Spa** at the year-old Andaz Maui at Wailea Resort heavily focuses on their signature Omakase treatments, which are founded on the Japanese principle of “faith in you.” What does this mean? Instead of a huge menu of treatments, guests customize their spa experiences. With Omakase, the categories are body (which covers scrubs and massages), beauty (salon services), and skin (facials). When you chose your duo of treatments (30-90 min/\$45-\$300), you'll be asked to arrive at the spa a minimum of one hour ahead. This isn't just to take advantage of the normal sauna, plunge pool, and relaxation areas, but because you'll be taking a little chemistry lesson first. Sounds daunting, but it'll be one of the most fascinating things about your visit. Unlike other spas where you wait in a sitting area, the first thing you do at Awili is head to the apothecary table. This space is solely dedicated to the mixing and blending of the ingredients you choose for your treatment. The resident apothecarist, Kate (or as I secretly called her “mad scientist”), will ask tons of questions like, “what's your mood today?” and “do you prefer lime or coconut?” all while pulling out bottles and jars of dried pineapple, oils, and even cayenne pepper (used on a guest who had sore muscles) for you to smell them. These ingredients are fresh, from the herbs to the fruit waiting to be squeezed or mashed, because unlike other so-called “natural” spas, Awili's spa director works along with the hotels' culinary team. This means leftover ingredients from the Andaz's restaurants and bars are immediately sent to the spa to be baked, dehydrated, and finely ground to use in treatments from scrubs to wraps. Once all of the questions of your mood, body temperament, and your health focus are answered, your choices are mixed in front of you and separated according to what therapy you've decided for the day. I had a particularly heady mixture of coconut, mashed avocado, chamomile honey, lavender, and peppermint for my body wrap. In the treatment room I proceeded to get a scrub-slash-massage that was abrasive enough to penetrate through layers of dead skin. Afterward, the glow could have been from the Hawaiian sun streaming in the windows, or it could have been me. I'd also chosen an Omakase manicure, and my jar of coffee scrub with black tea and lemongrass powder, avocado oil, peppermint, and lemongrass was handed to the aesthetician who used the exfoliant to smooth my hands to silk status. Not only was I given my leftovers in a fresh jar to take home, my “recipes” are now in the spas digital file in case of a repeat visit (or if I'd like it recreated and shipped to my home 4,855 miles away). That's how far the Aloha spirit travels. www.maui.andaz.hyatt.com

—Chanize Thorpe

SPA GRANDE AT GRAND WAILEA RESORT MAUI, HAWAII

When it comes to luxury spas, the **Spa Grande** at the Grand Wailea Resort on Maui is considered by many to be the Gold Standard. Not only is the 50,000-square-foot spa the largest spa in Hawaii with 40 treatment rooms, but the separate men's and women's termé hydrotherapy circuit merges therapies from the East, West, and native Hawaii to include just about every kind of water therapy a guest might want. Before your spa treatment, you can relax in a Roman whirlpool with cold plunge, dry Redwood sauna, eucalyptus steam room, 20-jet Swiss showers, a Japanese soaking tub with hot and cold plunges, five different Hawaiian sea-salt baths, and an incredible ten-foot-high cascading waterfall that feels like a firehose on your back and shoulders. The entire termé circuit, including a full-body honey-mango loofah exfoliation is included for free with any spa treatment, which is why you'll feel like a million bucks even before your treatment has begun. The spa menu includes treatments from around the world, as well as native treatments like the Niu Coconut Muscle Relief massage (80 min/\$235). First the body is brushed with raw, dry coconut fibers, then massaged with pure coconut oil to moisturize and relieve inflammation, and finally coconut shells are rolled and glided over the muscles to release tension. The Royal Hawaiian Pohaku facial (80 min/\$245) uses organic skincare and hot lava stones for an indulgent facial that also includes scalp, hand and foot massage. The resort itself is massive, with 780 rooms and suites surrounding an impressive water park, right on the popular Wailea beach. The 770,000-gallon Wailea Canyon Activity Pool comprises nine pools connected by a river, four surprisingly fast (hold onto your GoPro), intertwining slides, a sand beach, six waterfalls, three Jacuzzis, the world's first water elevator, and a swim-up bar located inside a giant cave-like grotto. Parts of the pool areas and all the rooms in the Grand are set for a significant renovation to be completed by Dec 2014, which will make the resort more eco-friendly. www.grandwailea.com

—Paul Horne

THE SPA AT MANDARIN ORIENTAL BOSTON BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Boston's Back Bay neighborhood, with Boylston Street, the Shops at Prudential Center indoor shopping complex, and that same building's 50th-floor observatory, is bustling indeed. Located smack dab in the middle, Mandarin Oriental Boston is part of this buzzy nest, and so is an oasis of tranquility and pampering: the 16,000-square-foot blissful **Spa**. Totally modern, rich with wood, marble, and subtle Asian-design accents, the spa features nine treatment rooms and gender-segregated pre- and post-treatment facilities: experience showers, vitality pools, ice fountains, a quartz crystal steam room, and relaxation areas. As with all Mandarin Oriental spas, UK brand Aromatherapy Associates provides treatment products, including the Inner Strength oil that figures into Boston's exclusive Inner Strength treatment. Launched during October 2013, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, this special oil blend, incorporating clary sage, rose, frankincense, and cardamom, was created by Aromatherapy Associates co-founder Geraldine Howard during her devastating battle with eye cancer (she was diagnosed in 2011 and ultimately lost an eye). Geared toward those going through rough patches or bouncing back from physical or emotional trauma, the Inner Strength Journey (110 min/\$270 weekdays/\$295 weekends) entails an application of heated compresses, breathing exercises, and foot reflexology. Foot therapy also figures into The Boost (110 min/\$270), one of three facial treatments making up the menu's Gentleman Essentials section. The other two are the stimulating Power Lift Facial (110 min/\$355) and deep-cleansing Refinery Facial (80 min/\$200). If local essence is your priority, the New England Retreat (110 min/\$270), includes a body scrub and massage, and puts regional herbs to use. No matter which you choose, you'll leave this spa glowing and soothed. www.mandarinoriental.com/boston

—Lawrence Ferber

ESPA, VDARA HOTEL LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

Always-changing Vegas welcomes its first **ESPA** spa and salon at the stylish **Vdara Hotel**, a chic escape from the more traditional casinos with amazing views of the strip. Hailing from the UK, ESPA is a luxury, holistic, and eco-friendly brand that has its own natural skincare and product line, which are used during treatments at 350 spas in 55 countries (with only three in the US). Located on the Vdara's second floor, the 18,000-square-foot, two-level facility features a salon, spa, fitness center, and juice bar. After checking into the spa, you enter the modern locker and lounge area, and you are greeted by an attentive staff. The vanity area nearby is perfect for trying out ESPA and other European grooming products, and then there's a small Jacuzzi, eucalyptus steam room, sauna, and heated lounge chairs to enjoy. When you are ready, you can then head to the co-ed treatment waiting areas and meditation lounges that have wooden floors, bubbling water fixtures, flowers, and glass chandeliers. Personalized spa treatments are ESPA's main focus for visitors to ensure an intimate spa escape, but there are also detailed, result-driven treatments available. To soothe away stress, the On the Rocks (110 min/\$325-\$350, depending on day) treatment is a chakra-balancing therapy that rebalances the body and cures muscular tension. This includes a body brushing and body polish to smooth the skin, a body massage with oils and volcanic stones for muscle tension, and finishes with a relaxing scalp massage. www.vdara.com/espa

—Andrew Villagomez

THANN SANCTUARY SPA CASTLE HOTEL & SPA TARRYTOWN, NEW YORK

Following a \$12 million property-wide refresh, this historic Westchester County (25 miles north of Manhattan) landmark, formerly Castle on the Hudson, reopened last year brighter and breezier than ever before. Built between 1897 and 1910 and transformed into a luxury hotel in 1997, the Norman-style Castle's majestic appointments include 31 luxury rooms and suites (the topmost Spire Suite is stunning—Hudson River and Manhattan skyline views included), renowned Equus Restaurant, and Mediterranean-style pool with grotto bar. Royal, too, are treatments at the new **THANN Sanctuary Spa**, housed in a curvilinear stone-walled oasis just below the Castle. Originated in Bangkok, Thailand, THANN is a renowned concept found throughout Asia. New to the US, and found only at the Castle, THANN, as shared with my partner, is a singular journey. After removing our shoes and selecting "Sea Foam" (peppermint and eucalyptus) for the foot bath to follow, we were escorted from reception to the changing room. Dressing in traditional loose-fitting Thai massage wear following a leisurely steam and shower, we then repaired to the co-ed Relaxation Room, where, reclined on chaise lounges facing a floor-to-ceiling glass wall, we gazed upon the natural scenery outside. From there it was off to paradise in the VIP Suite's canopied outdoor treatment area, led by the celestial James and Samantha. Each with seven weeks' THANN training in Thailand, they bathed our feet in wooden tubs. Then, we stretched out side-by-side on the padded bed, where, sung to by birds and caressed by the breeze, we received deep, deep traditional Thai massage (90 min/\$200). On the bed with us, James and Sam pushed, pulled, kneaded, and rowed our bodies with their hands, feet, knees, and elbows. Yoga-inspired and designed to release and realign energy from the feet up, we christened this glorious foursome the Kama Sutra of massage. Back in the Relaxation Room, on cloud nine, we enjoyed vegetarian Thai rolls and cold sparkling water while perusing the menu for next time. Thai Massage with Herbal Compress (120 min/\$280). Nano Shiso Anti-Aging Facial (70 min/\$160). Fellow kings and queens, your royal treatments await. www.castlehotelandspa.com

—Jeff Heilman

TRAVAASA AUSTIN AUSTIN, TEXAS

Far past the craft-beer bars and flannel-wearing hipsters, **Travaasa Austin** (about a 30-minute drive from the city center) offers a different impression of Austin's "get down" reputation. Located within the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve in the remote and woodsy Hill Country, Travaasa Austin is a 70-room experiential resort with an emphasis on health and wellness. But don't assume it's your typical destination spa retreat. Among an organic farm, hiking trails, and horse stables, Travaasa Austin sports an outdoor challenge course, pump track for biking, and even a mechanical bull to help tone that core. Guests can choose typical group classes, like yoga and Zumba, or go wild with archery and equine experiences. If you can get past the spa's fun and funky boutique shop with novelty items and indie bath products, the infinity pool flaunts scenic and sprawling views that will seduce. There are 11 treatment rooms, though guys will feel even more welcomed with the dedicated men's spa menu and a treatment room designed specifically for them. "Western Sky" is lined with reclaimed Douglas fir wood, the ceiling is a cool, fiber-optic "sky," a corner "bar" is stocked with lemon water and juices, faux-suede duvet and western flannel throw pad up the massage table, and a wooden taxidermy deer head anchors the room's masculine side. My male therapist had a ninja-like grip for a custom massage (50 min/\$140) and, best of all, he intuitively knew my body's sorest, post-work out muscle tension. I was also impressed with the Organic Men's Custom Facial (50 min/\$130), which features the products of Organic Male Skin Care, a popular men's grooming line that male guests can even sample in the changing room. My new mug was back to tip-top shape, and the spa in general was the perfect Austin escape. www.travaasa.com/austin

—Jimmy Im

SALAMANDER RESORT & SPA MIDDLEBURG, VIRGINIA

Just 40 minutes outside of Washington D.C. is a yoga class where you won't hear "om," but rather "neigh." That's the sound the stallion may make when you take part in the Yoga on Horseback exercise (30 min/\$150) offered at the **Salamander Resort & Spa**, an equestrian-themed hideaway owned by BET's co-founder Sheila Johnson. An avid horse-lover and golfer, Ms. Johnson created a haven from the trials of capitol life that centers around her hobbies. This truly unique yoga program for starters, places you with a horse and uses the animal's body and your weight to perform stretches and moves designed to improve your balance, strength, and flexibility. But before you try and master a downward dog atop the horses back (yeah, it's been done), you're required to start off with the Yoga in the Stable class (60 min/\$25) in the Equestrian Center. At the break of dawn, you sit on a mat and practice traditional poses: sun salutations, warrior, and tree poses to warm up your muscles. Then you walk around and pick the gentle horse that will help you with your yoga. This prelude is meant for you to bond with the horse, relax your nerves, and limber up for what's to come. At first I thought the program was a bit hokey, but you really can get an excellent stretch from the length of a horses back, stretch your calves, and work on your breathing if you pay close attention to the cues of the instructor, and above all trust your horse. When I witnessed the trainer balance her whole body atop the stillness of that beautiful chestnut animal, with the sunlight in the background (a sight to behold), it no longer seemed gimmicky. Afterward, some take a trail ride on the resorts' extensive grounds, then pamper themselves inside the simple but elegant spa with its outdoor courtyard and infinity edge pool. A natural treatment to choose after a morning of equestrian fun? The Riders' Relief Massage (50 min/\$150, 80 min/\$200). It's especially helpful if it's been a while since you've rode, or it's your first time, because without it your muscles will remind you the next day. But as they say, it hurts so good. www.salamanderresort.com

—Chanize Thorpe