

## How to Spa

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The hundreds of subtle touches that define the moment when you first step inside a spa, right down to the soothing trickle of a water fountain or the wafting scent of lemongrass, have been carefully envisioned and executed with your comfort and contentment in mind. But ultimately, what you take away from the experience rests largely with you. Whether you're a first-timer or a seasoned spa-goer, following these suggestions can help guarantee enhanced spa time, making certain that you get the most for your money.

### 1 LOOK FOR AUTHENTICITY

Many of the spa world's newest offerings — margarita pedicures, chocolate baths — sound like they belong on a restaurant menu. And the truth is, although they're entertaining, they may offer few (if any) health benefits. If you're looking for long-lasting gains, opt instead for tried-and-true therapeutic options like detoxifying lymphatic drainage or body-opening Thai massage, and treatments with proven healing ingredients like mud salt, essential oils, and medicinal herbs.

### 2 EXPAND YOUR OPTIONS

Part of the spa experience should include moving beyond your comfort zone and trying out something different, especially if you're a veteran spa-goer. Peruse the treatment menu for unusual or hard-to-find therapies you've never tried before (energy work, perhaps) and explore fitness offerings, as well. The best spa experiences are usually those that bring up new feelings and promote lasting change.

### 3 VISIT OF-PEAK

Most spa-goers book their treatments for late in the afternoons or early evenings at the end of the week, with Saturdays being the busiest. Try spa-ing during off-peak hours for a bit more peace and quiet.

### 4 BOOK BLOCKS OF TIME

A growing trend is "booking time" rather than specific treatments. Some spas encourage you to reserve two hour-plus blocks of time and, once in the treatment room, determine the most appropriate treatments with your therapist, who will offer expert advice on what will be most beneficial for you right at that moment. Along similar lines, rather than scheduling a massage and a body wrap as separate treatments, consider booking one longer treatment that incorporates several modalities.

### 5 EXPRESS YOUR PREFERENCES

If you're a fan of deep tissue work or you absolutely want a female therapist, be sure to convey this information when making your appointment. The individual taking your call is often the one who will determine the therapist, taking your requests into account. This conversation is also the perfect time to talk through the various treatments on offer to determine which are best suited to your needs.

### Spa Team Tip: Get Personal

It took me far too many massages to speak up about the areas of my body that I enjoy having rubbed and those that I don't. For example, back work doesn't really do much for me, but I LOVE head, foot, hand, and neck massage. Once I finally started expressing my personal preferences from the start of the treatment, I spent more of my massage time really enjoying the experience and less wishing the therapist would move to another part of my body. - *Melissa MacCalla, Web Editor*

### 6 LOOK FOR EXPERIENCE

Just as you would of any professional, inquire about the training and certification of your therapist. In the United States, therapist licensing requirements vary state to state, but many of the larger resort spas go beyond their state's criteria by requiring at least 1,000 hours of training and five years hands-on experience before they will consider hiring someone. In some cases, a spa will differentiate their most senior staff with telling titles like "master" or "lead" therapist, and you can request one of these highly skilled therapists to ensure that you're getting the very best the spa has to offer.

### **7 EAT LIGHTLY**

While a completely empty stomach may make you woozy in the treatment room, an overly full tummy could be uncomfortable, especially if an abdominal massage is included in the service. Try to eat lightly two hours before your treatment.

### **8 REFRAIN FROM ALCOHOL**

Although some spas offer a glass of wine or champagne with certain services (particularly couples treatments), the rule of thumb is don't drink and spa. Alcohol expands blood vessels and increases heat loss. In order to avoid dehydration, water should be your beverage of choice. (But take care not to drink too much before the treatment, or you might find yourself needing to run to the ladies' room.)

### **9 PAY AHEAD**

There's nothing worse than stumbling blissfully from the relaxation room and then having to dig for your credit card at the front desk. By paying upon check-in, rather than checkout, you can simply float back to your guest room or head home undisturbed.

### **10 LEAVE STRESS BEHIND**

The primary goals of spa-ing are to relax, unwind, and reconnect with yourself. Before stepping inside the spa's sanctuary, take a moment or two to pay attention to your breath. Allow yourself to forget about the outside world, focus on the present moment, and just be.