

Spa Roundup

Bodily Pleasures *This month, give yourself over to healing hands at some of the Desert's top spas.*

By Abbey Hood

You know you're nearly in the Desert the moment you see the Cabazon Outlets on the I-10.

"God, where are those outlets?" I'm wondering about an hour and a half into my drive from Beverly Hills. I am so ready for the weekend. Eighty-degree weather in February, a room overlooking the lake at the Desert Springs JW Marriott and a menu of spa treatments await. Yes, a weekend in the Desert is a little bit of paradise.

As I turn off on the Cook Street exit, I open my sunroof and pull up to the valet at the hotel. In no time they have my bags in my room, and I am poolside with my piña colada.

While this feels about as good as it gets, I've still got spa delights ahead—all to be experienced firsthand, on your behalf. How I do love my work.

Paradise Found: Spa Las Palmas, Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa

"What are you looking for in your spa experience?" Robb Boulton, lead therapist at Spa Las Palmas asks me before we start my treatment. It's a question I had never thought about, but one of the many reasons that makes a day at the spa at Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa feel personal.

I tell Boulton, a massage therapist for 16 years, that I had already found what I was looking for earlier today, lying by the spa's private outdoor pool: sheer bliss. Listening to the sounds of running water from the patio fountain, I felt then as if I'd drifted to a private island somewhere in the middle of a peaceful lagoon.

The 20,000 square-foot spa, which was part of the hotel's recent \$35-million renovation, is a destination for celebrities: Jessica Simpson and Tony Romo recently enjoyed a couple's massage during their stay.

The Spanish-influenced architecture, with high ceilings and balconies, reminds me of luxurious Mexican resorts along the beaches of Los Cabos. So I tell Boulton that I want to continue feeling like I am transported someplace far away.

"You should try the Pure FIJI Ritual," he suggests, noting that the treatment helps to moisturize the skin in the Desert's heat. It's a blending of a 25-minute sugar scrub and a 25-minute wrap, followed by a 50-minute Swedish massage for total skin rejuvenation. The FIJI ritual is one of three on the menu that combines scrubs, wraps and massages.

After my two-hour treatment, I walk into the hotel's new restaurant, bluEmber and relax by the fire pit while listening to the sounds of music from inside. It's a perfect way to end my day. See rancholaspalmas.com; 41-000 Bob Hope Dr.; 866-423-1195.

The One Stop Shop: Spa Desert Springs, Desert Springs JW Marriott

I wind around the resort grounds at the Desert Springs JW Marriott to arrive at the Spa Desert Springs. Along



Spa La Quinta, La Quinta Resort & Club

the way, I can't help but notice the beauty of the natural desert landscaping; it is a preview to what's inside.

As soon as I open the doors, I am drawn to the 10-foot waterfall in the 38,000-square-foot facility. When the spa reopened last July as part of the hotel's \$35-million renovation project, it came out with a bang.

Spa Desert Springs offers VIP suites with butler service, programmable desert-rain showers, steam chambers infused with essential oils, soaking whirlpools overlooking the golf course and a full-service salon.

"You can spend a whole day at the spa and never leave," says Director Dawn Ferraro as we walk through one of the relaxation lounges that embodies California Casual, with limestone and Brazilian Ipe wood throughout.

Set against the Ted Robinson-designed golf course, the spa complex includes a lap pool as well as a fitness center only available to spa guests. The center offers the newest cardio and strength-training equipment and a program of daily aerobic classes.

"This is something quite special," Ferraro continues as she opens the doors to the Spa Sanctuary, known as the spa within the spa.

This 600-square-foot private suite has butler service, a two-person hydrotherapy tub, a walled-in private courtyard, a changing room, a living area with fireplace, and, of course, treatment areas.

"A family reunion rented the room this weekend," Ferraro says. Believe me, if I were to have my bachelorette party in the Desert, it would be here.

Before I start the spa's signature Desert Journey treatment, Ferraro shows me the Spa Bistro, an organic restaurant only available to spa guests. Not hungry, I take my locker key and meet my massage therapist.

The Desert Journey combines scents of the desert in bloom in the application of creamy emulsions made of orange, tangerine and mandarin-

scented body butter, along with a light brown sugar body scrub. I also experience a paraffin foot treatment, massage and reflexology.

Once finished, I hop into the Turkish hammam steam room and rain shower to wind up my day at Desert Springs. Fellow (female) guests are chattering in the hammam, raving about the treatments they've received, saying they'll be back soon. See desertspringsresorts.com; 74855 Country Club Dr., Palm Desert; 760-341-2211.

The Boutique: The Well Spa, Miramonte Resort & Spa

"In Latin, spa means health by water," The Well Spa director Jennifer DiFrancesco says as we stand over a quiet wishing well. It's next to one of the outdoor private pools at Miramonte Resort & Spa.

Using this definition as its motto, Miramonte's spa offers signature water therapies including Hydro Yo-Chi wellness classes for guests.

"The Well is known as the boutique spa in Indian Wells," she notes as we walk through the 12,000-square-foot, Tuscan-style facility that offers only 14 treatment rooms.

A specialization in couples' programs that you won't find anywhere else in the valley is one of the reasons The Well is fully booked on this Saturday afternoon.

Waiting in the foyer for DiFrancesco, I glance at the Italian Comfort Zone beauty product line. In the background, I overhear the receptionist speaking with guests about a signature treatment, the Bagno Vino—a wine bath.

"You can bathe in a wine mixture rich in vitamins that hydrate the skin while sipping on a glass of wine," she says. Later DiFrancesco recommends this bath to me, to be experienced before a massage or treatment.

Accommodating the couples' treatments, The Well has five private

cabana rooms, surrounding the pool, which are ideal for two.

Something out of the ordinary for couples is the Pittura Festa per Due, or the painting party for two. In this signature service, couples paint each other with therapeutic mud.

My visit comes to an end in the front of The Well, which overlooks the resort's pool.

"We want the pool and the spa to be in synergy," says the director, adding that with this proximity "guests can come to and from the pool and spa freely." See miramonteresort.com; 45-000 Indian Wells Lane, Indian Wells; 800-237-2926.

Also Try: Spa La Quinta, La Quinta Resort & Club

For a spa on the east end of the valley, try Spa La Quinta at La Quinta Resort & Club. Located in a Spanish-style adobe close to its mountain backdrop, the spa is known for its La Quinta Custom Facial.

During this classic facial, which is designed to respond to your skin's unique needs and target areas, the esthetician chooses active ingredients such as vitamin C, collagen, coenzyme Q10, fruity acids, pure lactic acids and a tropical plant blend called "sleepy morning" to revitalize and pamper.

After getting the treatment last fall, my skin kept a glow that lasted for months. The spa is likely to be a hotspot for tennis pros during this month's Pacific Life Open tennis tournament. Located minutes from the Tennis Gardens, the resort caters to tennis buffs and celebrity clientele. See laquintaresort.com; 49-499 Eisenhower Dr., La Quinta; 877-527-7721.

Senior Reporter at The Beverly Hills Courier, Abbey Hood, is what some would call a "desert rat." Raised in Indian Wells, she attended elementary and high school, as well as junior college, in the desert. Her parents, Mary and Robin, reside in the valley. **CD**