

## **Austin Home & Living**

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### **Spaaaaah**

The very word evokes the fresh scent of rejuvenating herbs, the picture of a capable Swede kneading your knotted shoulders while your eyes flutter shut.

Why, then, is there that moment of uncertainty as you let the receptionist know you've arrived? *I wish I'd shaved my legs! Have I showered recently enough? What do I wear – or not wear? Who do I tip?* While it's normal to have questions, too much worry can be counterproductive to the goal of the treatments. So breathe deeply – and arrive fearlessly after perusing these answers to your spa concerns.

### **De-Mystifying the Spa or Everything You Always Wanted to Know But were Afraid to Ask** By Taylor Bowles

#### **My appointment is at noon, and I don't want to sit around waiting. How early do I really need to get there?**

Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes ahead of time, especially if you've never visited that particular spa before. This will give you time to check in, fill out any necessary paperwork and get undressed and into a robe. If you have time, however, arriving even earlier can enhance your spa experience. Most spas have a steam room or sauna; spending time in one of these will loosen your muscles and calm your mind.

#### **I'm about to sit down to lunch, but I've got a massage appointment in a couple of hours. What should I eat – or not eat?"**

There is no prescriptive meal to have or avoid before a massage treatment – but according to Joy Sablatura, massage therapist at The Crossings Spa and Wellness Center, “you're more comfortable if you haven't just eaten a big meal.” Additionally, you should plan to drink plenty of water after your treatment, as it aids your body in flushing out lactic acid and other toxins in the bloodstream that have been released through massage.

#### **What do I take off?**

This is, perhaps, the most common concern among first-time spa visitors. The answer is simple: take off whatever you're comfortable with. While disrobing completely is the most common practice, leaving undergarments on is also entirely acceptable. “The whole goal is for the guest to be as comfortable as possible,” says Joy – and if that means leaving on certain items, feel free to indulge. Remember, you'll never be completely exposed on the massage table: the therapist will cover you in towels and undrape only the area to be massaged during the particular section of the treatment.

Another option for those uncomfortable undressing entirely is a facial and foot massage – a treatment during which you remain in your robe the entire time. “If you have your face

and your foot done, your whole body responds,” says Dr. Deborah Kern, Executive Director of Lifestyle Enrichment at the Lake Austin Spa Resort.

**Should I warn my massage therapist about my unshaved legs, flabby back, freckled arms, etc?**

“I don’t even think about it,” says Joy. In fact, she muses, “Massage therapy is a way to learn to be more loving and accepting of your body. It’s all beautiful.” Self-deprecating warnings only enhance our uncertainty about our bodies. Instead, try to focus on the beneficial properties of the massage, the gift of healing you’re giving your body.

**I prefer a female (or male) massage therapist. May I specify this when I make the appointment?**

Absolutely. “We need to know that,” says Joy. As your comfort – both physical and psychological – is of the utmost importance, anything that might detract from that should be addressed.

**Who should I tip? And how much?**

A 15 to 20 percent gratuity for the massage therapist is customary if you feel your treatment has been satisfactory. Most spas will either allow you to include tip on the credit card slip or offer a small envelope in which to place cash or a check for the therapist. The therapist will in turn tip the receptionist, so don’t worry about bringing handfuls of dollars to give to everyone who helps you out. Remember, they are only doing their job – which is to make your experience relaxing and free of stress.

**What can I do after my treatment to make the most of my spa experience?**

This question may not have your pulse racing at the receptionist’s desk, but it’s a smart consideration nonetheless. Deborah Kern says that getting the most out of your experience depends on extending your relaxation time. “Pretend the appointment is going to last for six hours,” she suggests. “Schedule yourself for a long bath, light a candle, turn off the phone.” At both Lake Austin Spa Resort and The Crossings, spa guests are welcome to avail themselves of the sauna, steam room, pool and other amenities all day – the perfect way to transform your spa appointment into a spa experience.

**I think my husband would love a spa treatment, but he thinks spas are only for women.**

Just like you, men will appreciate a deep massage – and if you talk him into a facial or body wrap, he’ll probably be hooked on those too. “Our spa menu has specific treatments for men,” says Deborah; Lake Austin Spa Resort’s Gentleman’s Hot Towel Facial may be just the thing to ease a man into the world of spa treatments.

The Crossings, which opened its doors in September of last year, is tranquility defined. Situated on 200 acres overlooking Lake Travis, The Crossings offers a full spa menu as well as seminars in areas such as mind and body healing and spirituality. Ask for the Batu Jamu massage, an exotic treatment using hot stones and special citrus-based

massage oils. The Crossings is also open to day guests; a \$20 fee grants guests access to all amenities, including the pool, sauna, hiking trails and daily classes.