



## The Spa: Relaxation Versus Restoration

Spas were once thought of as havens for self-indulgence—a place where primarily women of means and free time would spend the day being rubbed and moisturized and painted. While spas still offer a welcoming repose in a luxurious setting, today's spas also offer a range of health and restorative treatments ranging from detoxification wraps to medically supervised non-invasive laser treatments which reverse sun damage and restore collagen. Moreover, today's spas are not just for divas. Everyday working women of all ages seek out their services, and increasingly so do their husbands and boyfriends.

According to the recently released 2004 International Spa Association Industry Trends Report, there are currently an estimated 12,000 spas in the U.S., an increase of 25% since 2002. While the majority of these are day spas, this figure also includes resort/hotel spas, and club spas. Stressed-out, youth-seeking clients spent a collective \$11.1 billion dollars to be pampered and repaired at these establishments in 2003. Of the 136 million spa visits reported last year, 23% of these were by men.

Just what exactly do these spas have to offer? Do you really leave younger and healthier, or just refreshed and revitalized? Are spas only good for the body, or do they touch the soul as well? In an attempt to answer these questions, we surveyed a number of relaxation and medical spas locally and around the country, and here's what we found.

### Green Waters: Can Spas Merge Luxury with Responsibility?

Wooded hills alive with cedar and oak spread across 210 acres in Central Texas, nurturing an extended nest of endangered birds. Welcome to The Crossing in west Austin, a spa nestled within the Balcones Canyonland Preserve.

The Crossings is one of a new breed of spas: eco spas. Not just your cabin and hot tub in the woods, eco spas provide all the perks of a spa, without the wasted energy of percolation. Spa Finder, the leading spa travel and marketing company, defines an eco spa as one that shows its commitment to the environment “with such practices as organic gardening, water conservation, and ecological building design.”

The Crossings doesn't just resemble this definition, it lives it. Laine K. Jastram, The Crossing's PR and Media Coordinator explains: “The owners and founders personify the phrase ‘stewards of the land.’ Everything from road and trail design, placement and form of structures, utility layout, treated waste-water dispersal, building green, and protection of trees through the construction process were all driven by the desire to minimize site degradation and create an energy efficient, environmentally friendly retreat. The entire site design and layout of the buildings were guided by the clients' desire to connect with the beautiful Hill Country landscape.”

Though rare, The Crossings is far from alone. Eco spas are growing worldwide, or at least they appear to be. Without an agency to police environmental practices, any spa can call its healing waters green. When searching for an eco spa it's crucial to look for a combination of environmental practices. El Monte Sagrado resort in Taos, New Mexico, fits this bill, recycled paper and all. The newly opened \$50 million dollar eco retreat features an expensive geothermal and solar heating system, multiple biolariums, sophisticated greenhouse systems that recycle wastewater, and locally grown food. Inevitably their 20,000 square foot spa will claim a lot of water, but at least it's all treated with an environmentally friendly replacement for chlorine. In addition, the spa itself is constructed of natural clay and recycled materials. If all this care for the earth makes you wonder if the needs of trees take precedence over the needs of clients, you haven't sat back on one of their overstuffed couches while watching their satellite TV.

The Crossings also believes in this balance of responsibility and luxury. Says Jastram: “The guest experience includes hiking on 5 miles of trails; optional classes such as yoga, Tai Chi, or toning; swimming in the Olympic length lap pool; rest and relaxation and meditation.” In addition, guests are privy to an elite

roster of spiritual teachers. “Some of our more popular classes and workshops include yoga classes, especially Baron Baptise, John Friend, Gary Kraftsow, and Shiva Rea. The more popular spiritual classes include Don Miguel Ruiz, Ram Dass, Eckhart Tolle, Byron Katie, Debbie Ford, Lama Surya Das, Joan Borysenko, Thomas Moore, and Huston Smith.” This heightened awareness comes at a heavy cost: An inclusive spa package starts at \$575 per week per person. Yet this is a bargain compared to a single night’s stay at El Monte Sagrado which starts at \$245.