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THE SPA PROFESSIONAL'S CHOICE

american spa

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TRIBAL RETREAT

CURRENT SPA AT NORTHERN QUEST
RESORT & CASINO (SPOKANE, WA)



[spa watch]

Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve & Wellness Retreat (Western Cape, South Africa) is often on the itinerary for Brown + Hudson African-bound spa-going travelers.



A Great Spa Escape

Discover the allure of tailored trips that provide an insider's look into the world of spa.

VACATIONS ARE TYPICALLY ABOUT GETTING away from the grind of everyday life and engaging in activities that incite passion and serve as a source of joy. Whether it be skiing, scuba diving, or surfing, chances are there's a trip that strikes your fancy. In recent years, bespoke tour companies have become especially savvy in targeting travelers who want to sample a range of spa and wellness offerings in the destinations they visit. In years past, spa-goers would simply opt for a stay at a destination spa either here or abroad. Now, adventurous types can experience the best of both worlds with comprehensive spa programs

in exotic and faraway places. Creating the perfect spa-oriented itinerary has never been easier thanks to a host of travel professionals who specialize in customized trips.

Not surprisingly, certain destinations lend themselves to spa-centric itineraries. India, for example, is well-known for its Ayurvedic offerings. "We recently had the opportunity to explore the roots of India's famous wellness heritage, creating several spa experiences in southern India," says Oliver von Holzing, trip planning expert at Brown + Hudson, a company specializing in bespoke

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[spa watch]

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travel experiences. "Given the current wellness industry trend of emphasizing the central role of food in natural and holistic healing, it made sense to explore these themes together, telling a complete story throughout the journey." According to von Holzing, the itinerary examined the role of Ayurvedic herbs and spices in addition to the local culinary scene. While traveling from Chennai in Tamil Nadu via Chettinad into Kerala's spice hills, Brown + Hudson's clients met renowned Ayurvedic practitioners, yogis, and therapists, as well as famous chefs, farmers, and planters who shared holistic insights into South India's herbs and spices and their influence over the country's health practices and cuisine.

Because of its rich spa culture, Asia has also emerged as a popular destination for those seeking a spa-themed adventure. "Asian therapies, such as Thai massage, yoga, Ayurveda, and acupuncture, are staples on spa menus around the world," says von Holzing. "And with Asian domestic markets growing rapidly, we can expect an explosion of products and properties in the region offering local and Western treatments." Japan, in particular, is one country with much potential. "Having recently explored this wonderful and mysterious country, we are in a position through our own local contacts to give our clients access to the more traditional and remote Ryokans for real Japanese wellness experiences," says von Holzing. "This world has been and mostly still is incredibly difficult to access for foreign visitors. Also, some Japanese destination spas, such as **Hoshinoya** (Karuizawa), have broadened their portfolio to make Japan's take on wellness easier to understand and appreciate for Westerners while maintaining the strong local flavors." Ashley Isaacs Ganz, founder and CEO of the luxury New York City-based tour company Artisans of Leisure, notes that Bali and other Indonesian islands offer some of the best spas in the world. Offering private and customized tours in more than 45 countries, the company also arranges numerous yoga tours in Bhutan. According to Ganz, the trips typically include hiking, meeting with traditional Bhutanese astrologers, meditation, and more.

Other upcoming destinations include China, with its growing roster of international brands,



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Bushmans Kloof, COMO Shambhala Retreat, Maldives (Cocoa Island), and the Spa & Health Club at L'ao L'ao Hotel & Resort (Bariloche, Argentina) are all havens for globetrotting spa-goers.

such as Banyan Tree, Mandarin Oriental, Shangri-La, and St. Regis. "Europe seems to be reclaiming its former wellness prominence by rejuvenating its facilities in many places from staid and stuffy Euro spas to new state-of-the-art facilities that can easily compete with their competitors in North America and Asia," says von Holzing, who also notes that many are focusing on incorporating the healing powers of food. He points to the **SHA Wellness Clinic** in Spain, the first macrobiotic clinic in Europe, and Mayr & More (Carinthia, Austria), which offers mainly detox programs based on the rehabilitation and purification of the intestines through holistic healing methods.

While there is certainly no shortage of destinations suited to support a spa-related itinerary, part of the appeal of working with a professional travel company is its ability to craft enticing programs

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in places without a storied spa culture. Rachael Eteson and Sophie Mills launched Absolute Belize with the intention of delivering the best Belize has to offer with a personal and professional touch. Knowing the country inside and out, they're able to share Belize's hidden spa gems. "We have invested a great deal of time getting to know the facilities and offerings of the boutique resorts, jungle retreats, and luxury accommodations we work with," says Eteson. "We then spend a lot of time getting to know our clients, their tastes, priorities, and idiosyncrasies in order to tailor make a spa itinerary unique to them. Every itinerary is crafted on a client-by-client basis using our local knowledge, contacts, and discerning tastes to create something we feel offers the best experience that our clients could wish for."

For many, exclusivity is key. Blue Parallel, a bespoke travel boutique company, offers private, customized escapes to the spectacular natural and cultural wonders of Latin America. Providing insider access is what the company does best. "When making spa-specific selections and recommendations, we choose those with offerings that cannot be had anywhere else," says founder Emmanuel Burgio. "For example, a wine-based massage treatment in Cafayate looking out over the

vineyards, or a tropical spa experience outdoors in the Amazon listening to the sounds of exotic birds and other wildlife. We look for spas with innovative, indigenous treatments that offer the type of super-exclusive luxury that our clients expect." Focusing on South America, Blue Parallel creates itineraries that incorporate memorable experiences in a variety of settings. According to Burgio, South America's unique natural surroundings make it an incredible destination for spa enthusiasts. "Each destination offers new twists on traditional and classic spa treatments," says Burgio, noting the Harmonization with Crystals, Gems & Massage (\$145, 75 minutes) at the **Spa & Hammam** at Faena Hotel + Universe (Buenos Aires, Argentina) and the Thermal Fango Bath (\$95, 45 minutes), which uses special mud from the region, at the **Spa & Health Club** at Llao Llao Hotel & Resort (Bariloche, Argentina).

As spa-goers continue to become savvier, bespoke trips offer flexibility not found with other packaged tours. More importantly, they provide access to experiences that consumers wouldn't necessarily even know to ask about. When asked about the advantages a customized itinerary offers over other getaways, von Holzing sums it up best by replying, "You get everything you want and nothing that you don't."—*Heather Mikesell*

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FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
SHA Wellness Clinic
(Alicante, Spain) offers
alfresco massages and
a macrobiotic diet;
COMO Shambhala
Estate, Bali is an ideal
destination for yogis.

