

GET READY FOR SPRING WITH THE WORLD'S TOP HEALTH SPAS

With the bright lights of Christmas already dimmed, the winter blues have got most of us in their firm grasp, but the optimistic of us have begun dreaming of spring. The warmth of the sunshine, the colourful pop of a yellow daffodil. New life and opportunity have us breathing a sigh of hope. These are my selection of the world's most renowned and luxurious spas, whose tailored programmes will have even the most sorry-looking souls buffed and beautified come the first blossoms of the year.

ESPA Life at the Corinthia, London

Top of the list is the multi-award winning ESPA at the Corinthia, The ultimate luxurious, tranquil space, designed for those “seeking an exclusive haven dedicated to relaxation, health and fitness”. It is spread over four floors in the heart of London, just around the corner from Charing Cross station within the walls of this uber-sophisticated five-star hotel.

The spa features 17 treatment rooms, a private spa suite, nail studio, indoor swimming pool, vitality pool, amphitheatre sauna, ice fountain, and even private sleep pods bedecked with black cushions and luxurious throws. The temptation to camp out for some time is overwhelming.

ESPA prides itself on its tailored lifestyle programmes; their therapists check everything from your tension spots to ‘sensory preferences’ (i.e which essential oil you prefer the smell of) and adapt their treatments accordingly. Hope floats....

Rancho La Puerta, California

For those seeking a more immersive spa experience in the run up to spring, California’s Rancho La Puerta is the connoisseur’s choice. Here, guests are invited to “retreat from life’s stress and distractions on a healthy vacation that empowers your true self.”

Founded in 1940 by spa pioneers Edmond and Deborah Szekely, Rancho La Puerta is set among 3,000 acres of gardens and hiking trails, enticing each visitor to leave behind the woes of the fast pace of modern life. There is an organic farm, several pools, extensive spa and fitness facilities, a salon, an intimate library plus relaxation lounges and tranquil spots.

Spa treatments and therapies include nine types of massage, body wraps, body masks, polishes, showers and facials. Founder Edmond was known internationally for his health and philosophical writings from the 1930s well into the 1960s, and a program of lectures, games, workshops, entertainers, arts and crafts classes and more are offered throughout one’s stay. “We provide the true luxury of time and space,” says founder Deborah Szekely, “that which is most lacking in today’s life. Space to breathe freely, to relax and enjoy.”

The classic 7-day visit; a Saturday-to-Saturday program, is an equal mix of active challenging exercise, stretching, and relaxation, which ranges from meditation and massage to simply enjoying the pleasures of a sunny patio or a shady hammock. And this is the spa’s key charm and success; for guests are invited not just to relax and explore but are granted the headspace and support system needed to become an improved version of themselves, just in time for spring.

Florblanca, Costa Rica

For a healthy surf retreat, head to the fresh shores of the Pacific Ocean where Costa Rica’s Florblanca spa resides. Here you will find a series of small private villas (hardwood floors, open-air bathrooms, chill-out areas with hammocks) sandwiched between two of the best surfing beaches in the world: Santa Teresa and Hermosa. Here, howler monkeys and parrots join the backdrop of palm trees and tropical plants.

Guests can explore the rainforest, or gallop on horseback across miles of beaches. There’s also a swimming pool, open-air yoga and Pilates studio with bats in the rafters, and of course, there’s the surfing. No need to be put off if you’re a complete novice: Californian Richard Guy will be your patient and helpful teacher. “Ridiculously good-looking, very funny and an extreme hippy, he visited Santa Teresa as a 26-year-old and never left.”

It’s an intensive but rewarding programme. Most of your time is spent paddling out against the force of the waves; the rest is spent tumbling off the board as you try to master standing up. After a day of exhausting but exhilarating surf fun, guests leave the beach for the promise of dinner; tuna tartare with avocado, and seafood in a spicy coconut broth with brown rice.

There is a reason why Nicoya Peninsula – the location of the spa – has been identified as an area where people live measurably longer lives. This amount of rewarding exercise, healthy food and time spent in beautiful surroundings would have most of us wanting to stay forever.

The Farm at San Benito, Philippines

Since opening its doors in 2002, The Farm, which is located about 90 minutes’ drive from Manila, has been a mecca for those who want to purify their body and mind without compromising on creature comforts. It’s a top choice for soothing away the stresses of city life, offering a combination of detoxifying treatments, wellness programmes and raw food cuisine.

The Farm itself is an enormous coconut plantation set amid 48 hectares of lush green jungle in the foothills of Mount Malarayat. It has been turned into a working coconut farm-come-luxe getaway for those needing to detox and at this time of year, to refresh their bodies for the spring months.

The focus is on comprehensive programs led by licensed therapists, onsite doctors and food chefs. Choose from the holistic Wellness Program with its healing spa treatments (the Purification Treatment – Yin Yang Body Polish is popular) and additional services such as reiki and ozone therapy.

There are also specialised healing retreats that address concerns related to stress reduction, weight loss, environmental detox and diabetes management. Stays range from five days to four weeks, with the latter sounding very appealing right now to ride out the remainder of winter.

The Chedi Andermatt, Switzerland

This extravagant new hotel and spa in the Swiss Alps is already making ripples in the snow. Hailed as “a holistic and healing total escape” it is winning awards around the globe for its indulgent facilities. Surrounded by mountains in the Urseren Valley, 90 minutes from Zürich, it is a “bold and beautiful hotel that has it all: the looks, the location and a great spa.”

The bedrooms are huge and beautifully thought out, with heated stone floors, open fireplaces, cashmere rugs and iPads for every function (blinds, music, lights, fire). There are 10 treatment suites plus huge dressing rooms and private steam showers, making the spa one of the most spectacular around.

There is a hydrotherapy zone with baths and saunas, and a serene indoor swimming pool covered by a glass roof. Enjoy a refreshing morning swim overlooking the stunning mountain scenery of Andermatt before tucking in to a healthy breakfast buffet. Throughout the day, take your pick from hiking to luxury snow sports and after a tiring day of exercise, relax in one of the many luxurious nooks around the hotel next to an open fire. Recommended treatments to prep your body for spring include: The Chedi Oriental Ritual, a top-to-toe treatment of reflexology, a Ren facial, Himalayan-crystal body polish, and bathing ceremony. Balinese, Thai, Swedish and Ayurvedic therapies are also available.

La Mamounia, Marrakech

Set in royal gardens and designed with opulence and sensuality at the heart of the vision, Marrakech’s La Mamounia is a spa fit for a queen. Designed with marble and mosaic arches, ornate ceilings and glassy tranquil pools, previous guests to this haven near the medina include Winston Churchill.

The hotel’s signature products include black soap, Ghassoul clay, Argan oil, rose water and orange blossom water. Guests can pick from three hammams, nine treatment rooms, six outdoor massage cabins, an indoor pool and a hair salon headed up by Jean-Michel Faretra.

In preparation for spring, La Mamounia is offering two new spa treatments, and two new corresponding detox menus at the restaurants. These include ‘The Détox Treatment’: an indulgent one-hour session that serves as a full body cleansing process encouraging the release of toxins. It promises “regeneration of the body and soul.” Also on offer is ‘The Lightness Treatment’; a 45-minute combination of massage and cool stone placement to increase blood flow. For non-guests, La Mamounia also now offers a Detox Day Pass including a detox lunch, spa treatment and full access to the spa and pool.

Finish your day with one of La Mamounia’s new health inspired cocktails; the ‘Apple Flower’ and ‘Garden Party’ are described as two fresh “elixirs that will soothe the soul.” Welcome to spring.

By Harriet Constable

