

Condé Nast Traveler

SAVE BIG
ON AIRFARE BIDS

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

APRIL 2000

Hang loose!

READERS CHOOSE

40

BEST RESORTS
AND SPAS

to de-stress, tune up,
or just let go

EXCLUSIVE

JET LAG

The final cure



NEW

QUICK TRIPS

Short vacations in
3 hot cities

Provence

Ancient pleasures,
modern comforts

Spain

The meal of a
lifetime

Sichuan

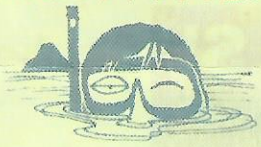
China's mountain
kingdom

Mexico

A surprise on
the Pacific

U.S.A. \$3.95
Foreign/Canada \$4.95

TOP 10 FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES



Resort Spas

869

The Greenbrier

It has top-rated golfing, sure, but how many other spa resorts also offer classes in off-road driving and falconry?

- 82.0 Grand Lido Negril
- 81.5 Grand Wailea Resort Hotel & Spa
- 81.1 Lodge at Koele
- 81.0 Four Seasons Resort Hualalai

THE STATS

SCORING

The independent firm of Mark Clements Research, Inc., asked 6,000 readers to rate more than 200 destination and resort spas in North America and the Caribbean that they had visited in the last two years. Seven criteria were used for resort spas: Spa Program/Facilities (36%), Treatments (18%), Location/Setting (9%), Rooms (9%), Diet/Cuisine (9%), Service (9%), and Other Activities (9%). Destination spas were rated on the first six criteria only, weighted equally. Scores represent the percentage of the first 2,536 readers who responded and rated features "excellent" or "very good" (see Key, page 148).

jewelry, your name, and your attitude at the door." \$5,375 for seven nights; 39 rooms; 800-424-0777.

2. Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires, Lenox, Mass.

89.8 85.7 91.2 75.5 84.4 87.1 85.6

"I arrived late at night and grouchy, but the staff's smiles and patience made me feel relaxed and well taken care of." A quick drive from quaint New England towns in the Berkshires, this destination spa has recently invested \$6 million in remodeling rooms and adding lounges. What hasn't changed is the "friendliness of the staff" and the "extremes they go to in order to educate the guest in exercise, diet, and skin care." Activities, treatments, and lectures are "ideal for a wide range of ages, male and female." This spa earns the highest score among both destination and resort spas for TREATMENTS. It offers everything from traditional massage to reiki ("She barely touched me, but I felt my energy clear, and I left invigorated"). And from the popular kick-boxing class and yoga to bike rides, jazz aerobics, and cross-country skiing in winter, "they have a way of making exercise fun." Weekday lunchtime cooking lessons give guests lots of "first-hand cooking options to remember back home" and flavor-enhancing tips like replacing the contents of salt shakers with Mrs. Dash. The meals are "consistently excellent," and although there's no salt or butter on the table, "all the food is flavored so well, it doesn't matter." Still want that butter? "You just have to ask and they'll gladly bring it to you."

\$1,100-\$1,330 for three nights; 127 rooms; 800-742-9000.

3. Miraval Life in Balance, Catalina, Ariz.

82.1 85.7 91.1 83.9 80.4 83.9 84.5

Clusters of roomy casita-style suites are surrounded by "blooming flowers, acres of desert, and the Santa Catalina Mountains" at this sprawling retreat 30 miles from Tucson. The focus is on achieving spiritual awareness, or "mindfulness," and developing "a greater health consciousness"—skills that can be employed long after guests have left the spa. During the high season, October through June, "it can be difficult to get your first-choice activities," but there's "a wide range of options": desert hikes, trail rides, water aerobics, golf, and tennis. (Tip: Sign the waiting list and show up on time.) The most talked-about activity is an empowerment class involving horses: "You work with them so intensely, grooming and walking but not riding them," that some say "you are able to control the horse's actions with your thoughts." The body treatments are trendsetters: Hot-stone massage started here four

years ago, and now it's a staple of resort and day spas across the country. Buffet-style meals mean "great choices" but also "make it more challenging to lose weight." "My husband was very happy with the food." \$395-\$870; 106 rooms; 800-232-3969.

4. Rancho La Puerta, Tecate, Mexico

90.6 68.8 95.3 68.8 78.1 82.8 80.7

Many describe this property's mountain locale, which scored highest among destination spas for LOCATION/SETTING, as a "magical place" surrounded by "the most breathtaking flowers and landscaping." This spa, considered the oldest in North America, started out with guests doing calisthenics to an old Victrola and pitching their own tents. Sixty years later, it scores highest in SPA PROGRAM/FACILITIES, since it offers "a huge variety and choice of activities and exercise programs," from African dance to Pilates. Guests forgo tents today for "rustic but comfortable casitas." The property has grown to 3,000 acres, with hiking trails throughout. Everyone eats in the dining room, in an "atmosphere that's authentic and homey." The vegetarian menu, which includes fish, is a trailblazer for what's called "clean food" (organic, in spa parlance). Overall, it receives mixed reviews (the chief complaint is that it's bland). "Everything is organically grown, and the herbs you see in the gardens are the same ones that end up in your potatoes." A week here is "very inexpensive for what you get."

\$1,850-\$2,040 for seven nights; 86 cottages; 800-443-7565.

5. Canyon Ranch Health Resort, Tucson

82.1 80.2 90.3 68.3 77.2 82.1 80.0

As at the Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires, "service and education are top-notch," and bring results: "My lifestyle completely changed after a few visits." The original Canyon Ranch, it attracts couples, women, and mother-daughter duos. The spa is in a desert scattered with flowers and cactus ("Sign up for the desert hikes when you arrive, they book quickly"). And its "state-of-the-art facilities"—like the new \$1.4 million Aquatic Center with six pools—offer "a multitude of treatment choices," from shiatsu to hydromassage. "They even have an underwater treadmill, which is great for injuries." "You leave refreshed and more knowledgeable about your body," and maybe having bought "the book with the Ranch's healthy but delicious recipes."

\$1,860-\$3,210 for four nights; 185 rooms; 800-742-9000.

6. The Greenhouse, Arlington, Tex.

69.6 73.9 60.9 73.9 73.9 91.3 73.9

\$3,500-\$3,725 for three nights; 39 rooms (women only); 817-640-4000.

7. Merv Griffin's Resort Hotel & Givenchy Spa, Palm Springs, Calif.

70.9 72.1 80.2 64.0 73.3 76.7 72.9

\$290-\$350 per room, not all-inclusive, with a two-night minimum on weekends; 104 rooms; 800-276-5000.

8. Lodge at Skyland, Woodside, Calif.

57.1 64.3 89.3 67.9 78.6 60.7 69.6

\$265-\$375 for two nights; 16 rooms; 800-851-2222.

9. Two Bunch Palms Resort & Spa, Desert Hot Springs, Calif.

60.2 77.3 73.9 50.0 60.2 68.2 65.0

\$175-\$625 per room, not all-inclusive, with a two-night minimum; 45 rooms; 760-329-8791.

10. Hilton Head Health Institute, Hilton Head Island, S.C.

65.8 52.6 78.9 63.2 57.9 68.4 64.5

\$2,195-\$2,695 for seven nights; 40 villas; 800-292-2440.

THE SKINNY

WHAT'S YOUR SPA GRIPE?

think that every spa should have a post-treatment lounge. The worst thing is getting a great massage and then being told to get dressed and get out."

—Tyra Banks, model (right)

"Generally they have uninspired decor and ugly bedspreads. I would love one

that allows nannies and babies so that a new mother can go to a spa to regain her shape."

—Christie Brinkley, model/Nu Skin spokeswoman (above)



"Everyone is on a diet!"

—Gisele Bündchen, model



"I haven't found the ultimate yet: a place where the very best treatments are given in surroundings of pure, strong aesthetics, with service and food to match. I just might have to create it myself."

—Anouska Hempel, hotelier