FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

100 Best Spas of the World

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No longer is the spa merely a rarified refuge for the genteel elderly seeking mineral-water cures and lingering quietly through a drowsy season. Today, spas are a huge international industry, the subject of magazines, Web pages, and syndicated newspaper columns.

Here is a kind of Michelin Guide to spas. The authors describe each spa and go into some detail about its facilities and activities. In addition to the usual suspects in North America, they describe spas in Mexico, Europe (including the Czech Republic), Turkey, India, the Middle East (Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Arab Emirates), the Pacific Rim, and Central America. There's also a section on cruise ships.

In recent years, the growth of personal disposable income has coincided with, or perhaps caused, growing interest in physical fitness, personal growth, and a willingness to explore alternative health modalities. Spas now offer their well-heeled customers the possibility of physical and even personal transformation—the basics within a week, the follow-up at the customer's inclination at home. The spas profiled here have their own chefs, dietitians, exercise specialists, and social hours—attendees are advised to bring their business cards as well as workout clothes.

Each write-up includes a page of text with some history of the place and descriptions of what's available—swimming pool, golf course, activities at the spa and in the neighborhood. That's followed by a guidebook listing with address and contact information, descriptions of meals (all healthy, the diet varying with the spa's focus), facilities, and programs. Rates are described by dollar signs, from $ to $$$; they start around $1,000 a week and go up—and up, to well over $5,000.

For the stressed-out businessperson with a week of badly needed vacation coming up, and who has pockets deep enough, this book could be a valuable reference work. For those who aren't, and don't, it's an entertaining glimpse into an unusual world.

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