



Tuscan Spas: Less *Luxe*, More Lively

Central Italy's terme add la dolce vita to the full-body workover.

With so many fabulous spas in every corner of the US, why would anyone fly all the way to Tuscany for a spa vacation? I asked Contributing Editor Ann Cochran, who frequents Italian spas, if it's worth it to travel to spend time at an Italian spa.

"For most people, a week at a spa would eat up their whole trip," she said. "So I'd recommend a spa experience as a portion of a vacation."

Italian spa tradition focuses more on cures for ailments than on wellness, stress-reduction, and beauty. Since Etruscan times, Italians have flocked to their *terme* (thermal baths) to breathe the moist air, drink and soak in the mineral-rich water, and slather their skin with *fango* (mud). The Italian government's health-care system pays the bills for citizens whose physicians routinely write spa prescriptions to heal digestive and vascular problems, skin and lung conditions, arthritis and rheumatism, and more.

Even with government coverage, "taking the waters" is going out of style with younger generations, so Italian spa management is responding by making changes that appeal to younger and more international guests. Some spas are changing faster than others. Still, almost all have physicians on staff.

There are 30 spas in Tuscany,

ranging from ridiculously luxurious to frighteningly clinical. Ann says you won't be disappointed if you drop into a more clinical spa for a facial or massage; however, for an overnight stay or longer, she recommends the following places. (Rates

San Giuliano Terme **(Between Pisa and Lucca;** **Ambience: Free Spirit)**

San Giuliano Terme is gloriously Italian and well worth a visit if you can overlook some crumbling and peeling paint. The

hotel, a villa with a dramatic yellow façade, was constructed for the Medicis, became a residence of the grand dukes, and was frequented by Lord Byron and Mary and Percy Shelley. Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* here.

The hotel and spa were run—barely—by the government from 1900 until 1995. New management is headed by charming, chain-smoking, America-loving Sergio Parenti, who is determined to bring the spa back to its old splendor. Oddly, the guest rooms were renovated before the spa and treatment rooms. At the spa, expect shabby chic, but in grand Italian style. Brush up on your Italian or plan on creative communication with

spa attendants.

www.termesangiuliano.com
50-818047

Rates: Anti-aging package includes seven nights' lodging, full board, and two breast-toning treatments for just under \$1,000. The least expensive package, Friday night to Sunday afternoon, is about \$285 and includes two massages, two hydro-massages, a facial, and a medical checkup.



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are per person based on double occupancy. The country code for Italy is 39.)

Spa Style: Italy vs. America

Italy	America
Throbbing rock to classical	Enya New Age
Paper thong	Careful draping
Walls with gaps	Soundproofing
Chatter	Silence
Tips included	Tips expected
Seasonal	Year-round
Physicians	Cosmeticians

Grotta Giusti Terme (45-minutes from Florence; Ambience: Royal Family)

Grotta Giusti Terme, in the Monsummano hills, is set in a 65-acre park. The world's largest thermal grotto was discovered by accident in 1849 by local quarry workers, whose arthritic pains disappeared while they dug.

The hotel is a dead poet's 19th century villa with period furniture, frescoed ceilings, Murano chandeliers, a large restaurant with great high- and low-fat food, and a multi-lingual staff that aims to please. Guests sleep in hand-stenciled rooms and soak in oversized marble tubs.

Spa treatments aside, the underground world takes some getting used to. In the caves, there are three stages of mist, heat, and humidity. One walks past stalactites and stalagmites from a section called Paradise to the turquoise pool of Limbo, on to Purgatory. If you can take the heat, you'll reach the Inferno.

www.grottagiustispa.com
57-290771

Rates: \$388 per night (four-night minimum) package includes three meals a day, three facials, three body massages, three hydro-massages.

Terme di Saturnia (1.5 hours NW of Rome; Ambience: Sex and the City)

Saturnia's philosophy is "exclude physical stress, painful deprivation, or compulsory activity. Regenerate yourself only through

pleasure."

The most "Hollywood" of the spas, Saturnia is modern and sleek with a happening bar. The bartenders might be more familiar with French cosmopolitans, but they'll make any drink you desire. The international staff is led by an American general manager, Kirk Lemley.

Saturnia's concierge arranges plenty of sightseeing and nightlife excursions. The property has a driving range, and a golf course will

open in 2004. This is horse country; riding is a popular diversion.

Accommodations, all four-star, include the restored travertine mansion or its new wing with spacious rooms that are so luxurious the closets have marble seats. Evening turndown service includes a fresh linen square to step on as you climb into bed, proving Saturnia's head-to-toe pampering.

www.termedisaturnia.it
564-600-800

Rates: In-season example—one week, junior suite, half-board (which includes your room and either lunch or dinner), and fitness program, about \$1,055.

Ann's bottom-line advice is to make a spa visit part of your itinerary of sightseeing, shopping, and feasting your body and soul in one of the many medieval cities that glow throughout the hills of Tuscany. ■

Closer-to-Home Getaway Deals

From the Upper East Side to Central Park West to Wall Street, all 10 members of The Leading Hotels of the World group in Manhattan offer up to 40 percent off regular rates, excluding taxes. The program is valid until March 30. Among the hotels participating are the Carlyle, with rates beginning at \$395; the Plaza, New York, with rates starting at \$269; and the Lowell and the Hôtel Plaza Athénée, both with rates from \$310. For a complete list, click on lhw.com; to book, call 800-223-6800.

This winter, Devil's Thumb Ranch in Winter Park, one of Colorado's top cross-country ski areas and located 67 miles from Denver, has packages good until April 6 that include lodging, recreational activities, meals, and shopping at the resort at substantial savings. A weekday getaway (Monday through

Thursday) for two is just \$199 and includes one night in a lodge room, continental breakfast, lunch and dinner for two, and two trail passes. Call 800-933-4339 or see all the packages at devilsthumbranch.com.

Santa Fe's luxurious Inn on the Alameda offers a **15 percent discount to February guests who have the same last name, street name, or town name (attention residents of Washington, DC) as any US president**. That brings the cost of a room as low as \$110 a night. Details: 888-984-2122 or www.innonthealameda.com.

Blackbeard's Cruises is offering seven-day dive trips to the Bahamas for just \$689 per person in January and mid-February, \$100 off the regular rate. Cruises, which depart from Miami every Saturday, include three to four dives per day. Call 800-327-9600 or visit blackbeard-cruises.com.