

# Retreat and Reinvigorate

Soaking up California's spa culture



In San Francisco's vibrant Japantown district, buses and bikes whiz by, teens congregate and people text as fast as they walk. But inside the Kabuki Hot Springs, the city vanishes. The only sounds in the dimly lit, Japanese-style communal baths are the gentle splashing of water and occasional strains of soothing music. In the sauna, you can lie back and detoxify as you treat your eyes to chilled cucumber slices. Then hit the steam room and exfoliate with lemon and sea salt. Follow with a long, lazy soak in the hot tub, and if you're brave, a cold plunge. When you're finished, start all over again. In fact, linger all day: it only costs \$22.

For people around the world, the name "California" means escape and conjures images of sunny beaches. But in today's demanding, perpetually wired world, a true vacation requires more than just a break from the office; it takes unplugging, purifying and restoring. Luckily, this is practically the

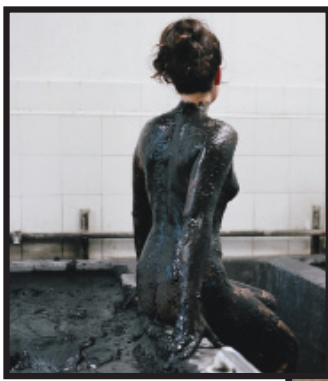
state motto.

California has been a resort destination since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, beckoning travelers with its year-round warm weather, spectacular geography and mineral springs. The 1950s brought yoga to the state, and the 1960s ushered in a wave of young hippies passionate about all-natural food and intentional living. Today, California is the nation's vortex of personal health and self-improvement, with spas and wellness centers almost as ubiquitous as scenic views. From five-star luxury resorts and posh day spas to holistic healing programs and "hippie hot springs," the array of retreats will dazzle even the most experienced serenity seeker. Here are some of our favorite spots for the new R&R: Retreat & Reinvigorate.

### Taking the Waters

Home to numerous large geothermal areas, California has for centuries been a celebrated mineral springs

OSMOSIS SPA meditation gardens, above left, and the famous cedar enzyme bath, above, provide great ways to detox both body and soul.



destination, with myriad spas statewide. Two hours inland from Los Angeles, Desert Hot Springs offers dozens of options, from the glamorous, sprawling Two Bunch Palms (featured in the movie *The Player*) to cozy boutique inns like Hacienda Hot Springs. The Central Coast also boasts famous baths, such as Esalen (equally known for its extensive list of alternative-education workshops) and Tassajara, the first Zen monastery built outside of Asia. But small, funky Calistoga in the north is the state's oldest spa town, renowned not only for hot springs but also abundant volcanic ash used for therapeutic mud treatments. Eight thousand years ago, the Wappo Indians named the area "Ta La Ha Lu Si," meaning "Beautiful Land" or "Oven Place," and today spa facilities run the gamut from luxurious to laid-back. The oldest in Calistoga—and likely California—is Indian Springs, opened in 1862 by Sam Brannan, the first gold rush millionaire. The property features an Olympic-size mineral pool, steam rooms steeped with eucalyptus and a meditation pond. (Tip: In the winter, book a weeknight room and receive two complimentary mud baths.)

AT INDIAN SPRINGS you can take a healing mud bath, above left, or luxuriate in their iconic Olympic-size swimming pool, above.



MANY FAMOUS FOLKS have gathered at Esalen over the years, including these folk-singing 1960s stars Mama Cass, Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins and Joan Baez in 1968; Esalen is also famous for the views from its hot tubs, right.

### Wine Country Wellness

Californians are known to soak up a lot more than wine in Napa Valley and Sonoma. Residents have long enjoyed the area's natural mineral waters, and today's spa menus overflow with treatments using grape seeds and skins, rich in antioxidants and polyphenols. For first-class pampering, lavish accommodations and a three-star Michelin dinner, visit the spa at Meadowood and order the Cabernet Crush, a warm grape-seed body wrap, followed by a grape-seed oil massage or facial.

But it's not all about grapes in wine country. At Sonoma's Osmosis, an innovative, eco-conscious day spa, the specialty is a cedar enzyme "bath." Guests immerse themselves to the





THE OAKS AT OJAI, left, is the place to go for healthy weight loss and conscious eating. Guided hikes in the mountains and water aerobics are also on the menu.

chin in warm, finely ground cedar, rice bran and plant enzymes. Heated by natural fermentation, the treatment is said to aid digestion, improve circulation and relieve muscle tension.

**Om Sweet Om**

When yoga came to America, some of the first studios appeared in Hollywood and San Francisco. The practice has since become a way of life for countless Californians, and hundreds of top-notch centers, from ritzy to rustic, cater to beginners and gurus alike.

One of the world's most renowned yoga retreats is tucked into the Santa Ynez Mountains above Santa Barbara. At the White Lotus Foundation Center, guests spend their days doing sun salutations in a canyon with ocean views, hiking through old-growth oaks, meditating in an underground Hopi-style kiva and swimming in natural stone pools. Massages are available, gourmet vegetarian fare is served, and sleeping quarters are heated yurts or creek-side camping under the stars. (Tip: Yurts 1 and 2 are closest to the center and, more importantly, to the hot tub and sauna.)

**Health First**

When the sublime Golden Door opened in Escondido in 1958, it was a pioneer among American spas. It's since become one of the world's finest health resorts, regularly hosting Hollywood's biggest stars. Golden Door specializes in fitness, Eastern philosophy, relaxation and opulence. Guests pre-arrange completely customized three-, four-, or seven-day packages with fitness options as diverse as Pilates, fencing, dance and archery. Best of all, each stay includes facial treatments, body wraps and daily in-room massages.

Another excellent (and more affordable) option is The Oaks at Ojai, where healthy weight loss and conscious eating are emphasized, and activities include hula hooping, Qi Gong, hiking and roller blading. Indulge in a pomegranate sugar rub, lemongrass lavender pedicure, or river-rock massage.

Ultimately, California's spa culture promises visitors far more than relaxation; it ensures that this time you won't need a vacation from your vacation. You'll return home refreshed and recharged—that is, if you can bring yourself to return home at all. **CA**

**>> FIND YOUR SPA**

**Kabuki Hot Springs**  
*kabukisprings.com*

**Two Bunch Palms Resort & Spa**  
*twobunchpalms.com*

**Hacienda Hot Springs**  
*haciendahotspings.com*

**Esalen**  
*esalen.org*

**Tassajara Hot Springs**  
*sfzc.org/tassajara*

**Indian Springs**  
*indianspringscalistoga.com*

**Meadowood**  
*meadowood.com/spa*

**Osmosis**  
*osmosis.com*

**White Lotus**  
*whitelotus.org*

**Golden Door**  
*goldendoor.com*

**The Oaks at Ojai**  
*oaksspa.com*

THE OAKS AT OJAI; FRANKIE FRANKENY



KABUKI HOT SPRINGS' Lulur treatment ends with a luxurious floral bath, part of a centuries-old ritual for Javanese princesses.