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Say Spa

THE SPA-CATION IS NOW MORE ABOUT STRESS-BUSTING THAN PAMPERING. SO IF YOUR BODY'S IN NEED OF A STIMULUS PACKAGE, TRY ONE OF OUR NEW FAVOURITES



BEST FOR: COMPLEXION PERFECTIONISTS
MILTON PARK COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL

WHY COME HERE: An Edwardian house filled with antiques, huge rooms, roaring fires and gardens with names such as Fairy Walk and Rainbow Lawn. And did we mention the facials?

If you want to drop kilos or embark on a massive detox, Milton Park isn't the spot for you. I mean, how can you sit by a roaring fire and not indulge in a tippie or three? However, if you're serious about your skin or want to treat yourself to some of the most divine body treatments on offer, this place is it. Spa director, Ariane Dobler, has created one of the most state-of-the-art facilities in the Southern Hemisphere, and one which is refreshingly European rather than Asian-inspired. (If I see one more Shiva statue ...). If you can, book her for a facial — she trains in Paris with Payot once a year and is one of the best therapists we've encountered.

On offer are reflexology, hot-stone massages, microdermabrasion and all those beauty-maintenance staples (waxing, tinting, spray tans) that you never get time for at home. A high-tech gym, hydrotherapy pool, steam room and sauna are also housed in the same building, so be sure to get your money's worth. **DON'T MISS:** The 90-minute Parisian facial. After a crystal exfoliation and clarifying mask, the skin is saturated with mineral concentrates and an intensive firming mask. But the best bit is the Payot 42-step massage technique the therapist uses to rejuvenate and tone your face. Plus, it's a great stress-buster.

BRUNO DAVAN

BOTTOM LINE: The hotel is 75 minutes' drive from Sydney, making it the ideal country escape for strung-out Sydneysiders craving a weekend of treatments, fresh air and fine dining. **AT A GLANCE:** Milton Park Country House Hotel, Horderns Road, Bowral, New South Wales, (02) 4861 1522; www.milton-park.com.au. *Eugenie Kelly*



BEST FOR: BURNT-OUT TYPES
GAIA RETREAT & SPA

WHY COME HERE: Can't recall the last time you exercised? Chained to your desk, terrified by the GFC? Been living on pad thai and skinny lattes? For all you Type A's desperate to switch off, Gaia is your solution. This 18-room boutique retreat, nestled among the lush hills and valleys of the

subtropical Byron Bay hinterland, is all about gentle yoga, having a glass of wine at night (with your organic meal) and treating yourself to a decadent afternoon working through the spa menu. Think you're going to be bored without the jam-packed activity schedule typical of most health retreats? Don't count on it. Take the recent "typical day" I spent there. Rise at 7.15am. Make the 7.30am, 90-minute yoga session led by Danielle Davis, a former international model. Breakfast at 9am in the gorgeous Samoan-style dining area. Naturopath consultation at 10am. Then a quick jog around the spectacular property at 11am (apologies, that's my Type A side coming out), followed by a swim and spa. Lunch at one. Rounded off by three hours of body treatments. Dinner at 7pm. Then back to my eco-chic room with a portable DVD player and a movie. No hairy deadlines, no frazzled editors and no screaming three-year-olds. Bliss. **DON'T MISS:** Gaia's signature three-hour Hinterland Adventure treatment. Here's what I can recall in-between bouts of blissful unconsciousness: we

start with a massage and body palming to melt my knotted muscles, which lulls me to sleep, only to be woken when a bored water-dragon kamikazes himself against the spa's window in a blatant bid for attention. A scalp massage with a rejuvenating peppermint-infused clay mask shifts my focus back to business, while my body is buffed with the Balinese-inspired Lu'Lur Hibiscus & Turmeric Scrub. I shower off outdoors, then step into a steaming milk-and-yoghurt bath scattered with rose petals, watching the clouds drift overhead while snacking on fresh rockmelon, grapes and kiwifruit. The finale is being slathered with nourishing coconut body butter — it's all very Balinese princess-like. **BOTTOM LINE:** If there's a hammock out there with your name on it, you're sure to find it at Gaia. **AT A GLANCE:** Gaia Retreat and Spa, 933 Fernleigh Road, Brooklet, New South Wales, (02) 6687 1216; www.gaiaretreat.com.au. *Eugenie Kelly*



BEST FOR: INSOMNIACS
GWINGANNA LIFESTYLE RETREAT'S SLEEP DISCOVERY PROGRAM

WHY COME HERE: If you're afflicted with insomnia (scary fact: 27 per cent of Australians are chronic sufferers), then this specialised sleep retreat is for you. It's designed to remove as many life stresses and sleep saboteurs as possible (cue peaceful mountaintop environment, no television, computer or phone, and a total ban on stimulants such as alcohol, caffeine and sugar). Early mornings start with a dose of sunlight, as you perform the ancient ritual of qigong, which helps to kick-start your natural body clock. Other activities, such as hiking, yoga, boxing and deep-water running, ensure that you burn any lingering pent-up energy and are more than dog-tired by the time 8.30pm rolls around. ▶

BAZAAR Escape

Even the food is portion-controlled and organic cuisine featuring sleep-inducing ingredients: turkey, pepitas (pumpkin seeds) and chamomile tea.

DON'T MISS: A Chinese medicine health assessment session with resident guru Neale Svenson, who will help you to find balance within your element (earth, wind, wood, fire, water or metal) by alleviating physical and mental blockages within your qi. For me, he focused on an acupuncture session for my feet in order to clear my liver and kidney area — two organs that directly influence how well you sleep.

BOTTOM LINE: Having spent months surviving on just two hours' sleep a night, this program taught me how to observe my body clock and quiet my endlessly chattering mind. The hardest part was leaving. At least now my shut-eye is the best it has ever been.

AT A GLANCE: Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat, 192 Syndicate Road, Tallebudgera Valley, Queensland, 1800 219 272; www.gwinganna.com. *Anna McLeod*



BEST FOR: SKI BUNNIES BREATHAKER ON HIGH ALPINE SPA RETREAT

WHY COME HERE: The adults-only policy and an obsession with deep relaxation makes this spa popular with worn-out skiers. This six-treatment-room spa is open during the ski season (and on select weekends during summer), and bases its menu around the four elements of fire, water, earth and air.

I sign up for the decadent two-hour Sapphire Sea Wrap: a mother-of-pearl exfoliation, pearl-and-kelp mud-wrap, and a hair mask and body massage using the Aboriginal-influenced Li'Tya product range. Note that a 30-minute geisha-style tub experience can be tacked on to any treatment. After a day outdoors in below-zero temperatures, being submerged neck-deep in a warm mud bath comes close to nirvana.

DON'T MISS: Forgo that final ski run to try Breathtaker's "water experience" area. Just turn up 30 minutes before your treatment slot to indulge in the spa's aquatic haven and thrash it out against the swim jets in the 20-metre pool. For a more relaxed dip, wade into the pool's private waterfall cave and zone out on the jet-massage lounge seats.

BOTTOM LINE: Forget après shots at the bar; Breathtaker is a much better way to unwind after a day on the slopes.

AT A GLANCE: Breathtaker on High Spa at the Breathtaker All Suite Hotel and Alpine Spa Retreat, 8 Breathtaker Road, Mount Buller, Victoria, (03) 5777 6377; www.breathtaker.com.au. *Sally Hunwick*



BEST FOR: SERENITY-SEEKING CITY SLICKERS

THE SPA AT BEECHWORTH

WHY COME HERE: The Spa at Beechworth may be situated inside the grounds of Beechworth's old psychiatric hospital (it closed in 1995), but this five-room treatment centre is all peace and tranquillity. Private meditation, life coaching, reiki, yoga and kinesiology sessions are offered, in addition to body and facial treatments. As I await my treatment, herbal tea in hand, I can already feel the calm colour scheme, high ceilings and sumptuous furnishings kneading out my urban angst.

All treatments start with an Aboriginal "smudging" ceremony to banish spirits from the room — not a bad idea when you consider the building's history. But such thoughts are forgotten as I'm exfoliated head to toe with my chosen pink desert salt (you're asked to select the oil, mud and salt that "speaks" to your body). Next up is a toxin-ridding red-clay body mask and a direct-to-la-la-land head massage with a Li'Tya Quandong hair mask. I'm then finished off with a coma-inducing full-body massage.



"You'll be asked to select the oil, mud and salt that 'speak' to you."

DON'T MISS: Beechworth is known as one of Victoria's grandest gold-mining towns and its spectacular English oaks and elms make it hard not to slow down and take in the nature. Book yourself into 1860 Luxury Accommodation, a beautifully restored timber cottage that's the perfect base for a weekend of spa-ing.

BOTTOM LINE: The Spa at Beechworth is just three hours' drive from Melbourne (or fly to Albury; 30 minutes away), so is popular with city folk hankering for some fresh air and serenity.

AT A GLANCE: The Spa at Beechworth, Albert Road, Beechworth, Victoria, (03) 57283033; www.thespaatbeechworth.com.au. *Sally Hunwick*



BEST FOR: INDEPENDENT TYPES INJIDUP SPA RETREAT

WHY COME HERE: Margaret River's most exclusive spa retreat is all about what you don't get. No mummy-wuvs-you turn-down service, fawning waiters, enforced conviviality, group-exercise sessions or communal dining.

Injidup nestles in a rare and pristine slice of privately owned coastal bushland

three hours south of Perth. The retreat offers 10 spacious villas, each with a private heated plunge pool.

Within the cool and calm day spa are two individual therapy rooms and one that caters to couples, each offering a smorgasbord of body treatments and massages using the Sodashi range. Rather than arranging a specific treatment, guests book in for an hour or two and decide what they fancy on the day after consultation with spa director, Naomi Gregory, one of Australia's leading spa professionals.

Staff will also arrange private yoga sessions and guided meditations. Better still, book a 90-minute couples

treatment and you'll get an upgrade to the luxurious spa suite. Treatments can also be enjoyed in your room.

In line with the owner's philosophy of pampering from a respectful distance, guests receive a complimentary gourmet hamper and each villa is equipped for stylish self-catering.

DON'T MISS: The serenity bath, a soothing blend of cardamom, mandarin and frankincense.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Pampering. Prestige. And the best bit — privacy.

AT A GLANCE: Injidup Spa Retreat, Cape Clairault Road, Injidup, Western Australia, (08) 9750 1300; www.injidupsparetreat.com. *Jane Cornes*

BRUNO DAVAN. IN THIS PORTFOLIO: STYLING BY VANESSA COYLE; HAIR BY WENDY ILES AT ARTIST PARIS; MAKEUP BY FREDERIC VAN ESPEN AT AGENCE AURELIEN PARIS. MODEL: NATALIA BELIOVA AT FASHION. WITH THANKS TO HOTEL RITZ PARIS