



Grab Your Girlfriends and Go!

TURN “ME TIME” AT THE SPA INTO QUALITY TIME WITH FRIENDS.

By Stacey Zable

Women are joining their gal pals for pampering, fitness and laughs at spas across the country and in the Caribbean, Mexico and Central America. No longer viewed as one-time trips, spa vacations with girlfriends are becoming an annual ritual for many groups who find them the best way to stay connected during busy lives. Spas are responding by offering more to cater to these groups of women with special services and classes, spa suites and discounted and added-value rates.

“As lifestyles in general are trending in a healthier direction, we are finding that girlfriends are not as drawn to the clubbing scene or a night out feasting on rich foods, and are more focused on taking care of themselves and sharing that with each other,” says Stacey Parks, Director of Spa Operations at **The Claremont Hotel Club & Spa** in Berkeley, California. “The Spa as a sanctuary to restore from the daily stresses of life is the perfect choice for smart, health-minded women.”

Girlfriend Getaways can include different spas each year for the annual trip, but for many, it's all about returning to the same spa year after year. Jamie Fox, Rooms Manager at **The Lodge at Woodloch** in Hawley, Pennsylvania, has seen the same groups of girlfriends make it a yearly tradition to visit his property and has noticed the numbers of girlfriend groups increasing year to year.

In response, The Lodge at Woodloch, as well as other spas including **The Oaks at Ojai** in Ojai, California, offer discounted rates that cater to groups, and the number required for group

discounts may be as low as only six guests. The Lodge at Woodloch, for example, gives a group of six 20 percent off regular rates.

Celebrations

Mother-daughter spa trips have always been popular, but now spas are attracting multigenerational female family members traveling together. At **Aspira Spa at The Osthoff Resort** in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin, General Manager Lola Roeh has noticed groups of three generations, including grandmothers, mothers, daughters and aunts.

“The spa provides an intimate environment for them to reconnect and share the spa experience together,” says Roeh. “It removes them from their regular responsibilities and schedules and allows them to talk and be with each other without the normal time constraints and distractions of everyday life.”

Often these generations come together at a spa to celebrate milestones. Tara Shewey, Spa Manager at **The Spa at the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club** in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, has observed an increase in prewedding bachelorette parties with the bride, her bridesmaids and often their mothers joining them. Melanie Nicholson, Manager at **Maruba Resort Jungle Spa** in Maskall Village, Belize, has also seen an increase in bachelorette spa parties. Shewey says the tradition continues later in married life as well, with baby showers on the rise at her spa thanks to a wide range of maternity services available.

Group Girlfriend Fun

Spa Suites, enabling groups of girlfriends to be pampered at the same time, have become popular at spas catering to girlfriends. At Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, the Spa's Friendship Suite allows gal pals to receive services side by side in the same room. At The Claremont Hotel Club & Spa, the Sunset Spa Experience for groups of six or more gives girlfriends the spa all to themselves after hours. Friends sharing SpaSuites at Aspira Spa can enjoy their treatments in private spaces that also include whirlpool baths, fireplaces, lounge areas, bathrooms and expansive shower areas.

The Hydrotherapy Ritual at **Le Blanc Spa Resort** in Cancun is ideal for Girlfriend Getaway groups, who get to spend an hour relaxing together enjoying such delights as herbal steam, dry sauna, color therapy, whirlpools and cool or warm lagoons, with time to chat and relax enjoying fresh fruit, tea, water and fruit beverages. **Grand Wailea, A Waldorf Collection Resort** in Wailea on



PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THE CLAREMONT HOTEL CLUB & SPA, PONTE VEDRA INN & CLUB, RED MOUNTAIN RESORT, THE BODYHOLIDAY LESPORT, RED MOUNTAIN RESORT

Maui, Hawaii, has its own Termé Hydrotherapy Circuit featuring five aromatic baths, eucalyptus steam and redwood sauna where girlfriends can indulge in time together before their treatments.

Girlfriends heading to **The Spa At The Hotel Hershey** in Hershey, Pennsylvania, aren't likely to leave without at least one chocolate-based treatment—and there are loads to choose from, including even an edible dark chocolate face mask as part of the new “Cocoa Facial Experience.” Following the treatments, girlfriends can meet up at the Spa-only restaurant, The Oasis, where among the choices are mini desserts and wine or, better yet, chocolate martinis.

“We definitely have seen a growth in women wanting to spend time together at the Spa,” says Rachel A. Dinbokowitz, a spokesperson for The Spa At The Hotel Hershey. “A lot of girlfriends seem to enjoy getting the same treatments so that they can chat about their experiences.”

Chocolate is not the only food that can be used in treatments and can get gal pals talking. The Dreams Spas by Pevonia at **Dreams Resorts & Spas**, with properties in Mexico and the Dominican Republic, often offer treatments inspired by their locations. One such choice at Dreams Riviera Cancun Resort & Spa in Mexico is the “Tropical Escape Body Wrap” which uses papaya and pineapple among the ingredients that are used to nourish and rejuvenate the skin.

Outside the spa, girlfriends are mixing adventure and the beauty of their travel destinations with fitness. At Maruba Resort, Nicholson says two “bucket-list tours” with a personal guide for resort guests are the jungle boat trip to Lamanai Maya Ruins and cave tubing on the Cave Branch River. Adventure thrills such as riding a zip line in the rainforest or climbing the Pitons can be arranged for girlfriends during their stay at **The BodyHoliday LeSport** in Castries, St. Lucia. Hiking along the Appalachian Trail is a popular activity at **Deerfield Spa** in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. At **Red Mountain Resort** in Ivins, Utah, girlfriends can enjoy outdoor adventures that include guided hikes, rock climbing, kayaking, cycling, horseback riding and, for a more spiritual adventure, Tai Chi on the Rocks held at sunset in Snow Canyon State Park.

Girlfriends also enjoy taking art and educational classes at the spa, “because they can be together as they create and learn new things,” says Debra Koerner, a natural health and wellness expert who is also the Executive Director of Destination Spa Group, an organization of 22 destination spa owners dedicated to educating the public on the destination spa vacation and defining the destination spa experience.

The Lodge at Woodloch offers drawing and painting as part of its complimentary classes for guests, and at The Oaks at Ojai, hula hooping and belly dancing classes get “girlfriends having fun and getting to laugh at each other trying these activities,” says Cathy S. Cluff, President/CEO of The Oaks at Ojai.

Sasa Pantovic, Spa Director at The BodyHoliday, says time at the spa “is about learning something new, and sharing this experience with your girlfriend just makes it even more fun.” She adds that it is also about being taught something that guests can take back home with them when they go back to reality.

Koerner agrees and adds that she has “seen grandmothers, moms, daughters, etcetera sweating in dance classes, creating beautiful sculptures, and cooking up healthy, sumptuous dishes at Destination Spas. Those are life lessons they'll carry home and pass down through generations.”

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