

# LUX LIFE

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

MARCH 2018

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# Spa hideaways

*Yoga in India, spirituality in Sedona or hot-spring healing in Austria? Take your pick with our resort hit list*

By BECCA HENSLEY



**I**n a world rife with external noise, oftentimes, we can barely hear our internal song — let alone realize how much we need interior harmony. It's never too late to start listening, though. Getting away from the bustle can help. Want to let the banter of technology, stress and gross abundance dissipate for a spell? Find illumination — or just some classic rest and repose — at these destination spa resorts, 10 of the best wellness getaways across the globe.

## *Lake Austin Spa Resort* AUSTIN

Edged by a verdant nature reserve on the banks of the Lake Austin, this easy-to-reach retreat has a casual sophistication with a design-minded lakehouse vibe. Check into one of 40 rooms with a view, then explore 19 acres that include boat docks and water toys galore (stand-up paddleboards, kayaks), hammocks strung between trees, several

swimming pools, an organic garden, high-tech gym, pathways to hike, two restaurants and an expansive spa complex offering 100-plus treatments, from wraps to energy work. Healthful meals, dozens of fitness classes, cooking courses and wellness seminars are included in the price. The best way to arrive with friends: the resort's new boat taxi service from central Austin. *\$1,785 for a three-day stay (spa services a la carte); lakeaustin.com*



LAKE AUSTIN SPA  
RESORT HAS  
MULTIPLE POOLS.  
*LEFT: STAND-UP  
PADDLEBOARDING ON  
LAKE AUSTIN*



WISTERIA GROWS NEAR A QUIET LOUNGE AREA AT RANCHO LA PUERTA IN TECATE, MEXICO.

## *Rancho La Puerta*

TECATE, MEXICO

Family-owned Rancho La Puerta opened in Tecate, Mexico, just across the border from San Diego, in 1940. Today, it remains a standard bearer for fitness-focused vacations (and a favorite among celebrities). A tranquil, joyful place occupying 4,000 acres in a nature preserve, the ranch continues its slow-food-based culinary tradition with fresh vegetarian meals and snacks. Highly touted cooking courses give guests a manual of new recipes to take home and continue their quest for wellness, too. More than 50 classes and activities to choose from daily, a spa offering a wide range of services including holistic therapies, plus themed weeklong stays, from yoga to nutrition, add to ranch's allure. A one-week stay here is the norm. *\$4,200 for seven nights (spa services a la carte); rancholapuerta.com*

## *Mii Amo*

SEDONA, ARIZONA

Amid a 70-acre parcel of pine forest-profuse, red-rock-dotted mountainside in mystical Sedona, 16-suite Mii Amo offers treatment-packed three- or seven-day stays, all inclusive of healthy meals, activities (think mountain biking and hikes across the region's famed vortices), fitness classes and spa time galore. Staffed with highly trained seers and therapists, the resort specializes in rituals meant to awaken the spiritual realm — from meditation to past life regression sessions to aura photography. Guests receive bespoke itineraries that allow for both experimentation (hypnosis to quit smoking? Native American modalities?) as well as the tried-and-true basic massage. *\$3,400 for a three-night "journey"; miiamo.com*



RED ROCKS SURROUND MII AMO IN SEDONA.



DESIGNED BY AUSTRIAN PAINTER/ARCHITECT FRIEDENSREICH HUNDERTWASSER, ROGNER BAD BLUMAU IS SAID TO BE THE WORLD'S LARGEST INHABITABLE WORK OF ART.



SPA VILLA AT BANYAN TREE PHUKET

### *Rogner Bad Blumau* BAD BLUMAU, AUSTRIA

This captivating spa hotel crowns two mineral-rich hot springs in southern Austria's Styria region, a rural hideaway among mountains, vineyards and fertile farmlands about an hour from Vienna. Designed by Austrian painter/architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser, the colorful structure — said to be the world's largest inhabitable work of art — evokes a colossal, otherworldly Hobbit House and was built to showcase the salubrious, naturally heated waters. It has myriad pools, jacuzzis, saunas and decks, plus subterranean passageways, more than 1,000 distinctly shaped windows and nary a straight line in sight. Guests spend their days immersed in water, cocooned in the spa, noshing on farm-fresh meals and frolicking on mountain trails. *\$1,000 for three nights for two people including all water activities and two meals a day (spa services a la carte); blumau.com*

### *Banyan Tree Phuket* PHUKET, THAILAND

Stretching across a gardenlike, beach-edged landscape near Bang Tao Bay on northwestern Phuket, the Banyan Tree flagship girds three villa communities. Spa Sanctuary, the most intimate of the three, promises a special place to concentrate on unraveling the body (and mind's) proverbially unpleasant knots. Its 12 eye-catching, private villas with sloped Thai roofs and local art and décor have personal pools as well as dedicated massage pavilions — handy for those who book the Spa Sanctuary package with unlimited massages. Special wellness courses, health-conscious menus and bikes for transport enhance the mission. *\$2,397 for three nights, including activities, breakfast and unlimited massages; banyantree.com*

## Verdura Resort

SICILY, ITALY

Ancient Greeks and Romans knew how to banish stress — they visited the spa. Verdura, a Rocco Forte resort on Sicily's southern coast (a mere hour from the eye-popping Greek temples of Agrigento) delves into both cultures and their spa traditions. The hilly seaside property, surrounded by vineyards, orange orchards and olive groves, instituted wellness programs last year. With Kneipp water therapy, serious science and house-made salves and oils, its uber-contemporary Verdura Spa offers four-day packages such as Rocco Forte Slim and Rocco Forte Fit, which include appropriate spa treatments (seaweed baths, sports massage), medical consultation, various activities and nourishing meals. *From \$3,136 for four-day all-inclusive program; roccofortehotels.com*

## Tabacón Thermal Resort & Spa

TABACÓN, COSTA RICA

The trees form a natural ceiling Costa Rica's dense tropical jungle, a holy place of organic repose. Some liken it to a cathedral. Joined by the watchful eyes of white-faced monkeys and colorful toucans, guests dip into Tabacón's thermal springs heated entirely by the Arenal Volcano's magma as it flows from its base toward the resort. The treehouse-recalling, 900-acre eco-chic escape — where guests are encouraged to wear bathrobes from arrival to departure — and its outdoor-bungalow spa practically guarantee a slower heartbeat and renewed spirit. Indigenous treatments, such as the Tabacón Massage, use mud from the volcano and words from the local language as part of the ritual. *\$1,495 for three-night package including some meals, spa and activities; tabacon.com*

## Cal-a-Vie

VISTA, CALIFORNIA

A sunrise hike, Zumba, yoga, a facial, nutrition lecture, golf — that's a normal day at this 500-acre health spa north of San Diego. The wellness programs at Cal-a-Vie, owned by Houstonians John and Terri Havens, infuse age-old European spa concepts with contemporary California fitness and nutrition convictions. Its design conjures Provence, underlined by a collection of art and antiques. During three-, four- or seven-night stays, staff create individualized itineraries for each guest, choosing from more than 160 fitness classes, beauty and spa treatments, and activities. Bonus for Houston stargazers: The new observatory has 26 seats acquired from the Astrodome. *From \$4,400 per person for three-night wellness program; cal-a-vie.com*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THALASSOTHERAPY POOLS AT VERDURA RESORT IN SICILY; CALIFORNIA'S CAL-A-VIE HEALTH SPA; A COMMON AREA AT CAL-A-VIE; OUTDOOR SPA TREATMENT ROOM AT TABACÓN IN COSTA RICA.



## Ananda

HIMALAYAS, INDIA

You can wear your resort issued kurtas (freshly pressed pajama-style yoga wear) all day at recently refurbished Ananda in the Himalayas, one of the world's premier Ayurveda and yoga retreats. Sharing 100 acres of Eden-like garden with peacocks and monkeys, occupying land once home to a maharajah, Ananda overlooks the sacred Ganges River and the famous yoga town of Rishikesh in northeast India. It offers five-, seven-, 14- and 21-night results-driven wellness programs, from de-stress to detox, from weight management to yoga immersion. Stays include consultation with an Ayurvedic doctor, lectures, meals for your dosha (Ayurvedic body type), yoga classes, meditation instruction, fitness classes and cooking/cultural demonstrations. Its spa, with more than 80 treatments, incorporates various Eastern techniques. *\$5,500 for five-day program for two including all meals, yoga, activities and spa; [anandaspa.com](http://anandaspa.com)*

## The Gainsborough Bath Spa

BATH, ENGLAND

In the bucolic countryside of Somerset, Bath is an easy drive or train ride from London. Long a spa destination for bygone cultures, both the Celts and the Romans, Bath has welcomed wealthy spagoers for centuries. Today, the Gainsborough is reinterpreting the past. With Spa Village, which utilizes the very same waters enjoyed by bathers of yore, guests can partake in an in-hotel thermal water circuit, a collection of pools with various temperatures, therapeutically positioned jets, a sauna and steam. Book the Spa Inclusive package, which includes breakfast, a spa treatment per person per night, and unlimited access to the waters. Feeling lazy? Choose a Bath Spa Suite, which pipes the curative waters right to the soaking tub in your room. *\$1,502 per night; [thegainsboroughbathspa.co.uk](http://thegainsboroughbathspa.co.uk)*

**RIGHT:** THE GAINSBOROUGH BATH SPA IN ENGLAND OFFERS A COLLECTION OF POOLS WITH VARIOUS TEMPERATURES AND THERAPEUTICALLY POSITIONED JETS.

**LEFT:** YOGA AT HAWA MAHAL AT ANANDA DESTINATION SPA IN THE HIMALAYAS, INDIA.

