More Than Skin Deep
Regional spas offer “a place to ease burdens.” • by Nell Porter Brown

When she finally felt confident leaving her one-year-old with relatives, Robin Lockwood Heffernan ’02, Ph.D. ’07, lived out any new mother’s dream: she spent a few days at The Spa at Norwich Inn. There, in the depth of New England’s snowy January, she swam in a warm, freshwater pool, had a massage, and padded around a cozy room in a thick robe and slippers. “I especially love having my feet rubbed,” admits Heffernan, a chemical engineer and healthcare business consultant in Boston. During her one-hour foot treatment, she recalls, “they soaked my feet, did a salt scrub and an aromatherapy scrub, and ended with a pedicure.” Meanwhile, her husband took advantage of the fitness center and reveled in a back massage. “There is tons of stuff to do here,” she says of the Connecticut hotel spa, which also happens to be near the Mohegan Sun casino. “There’s a good balance: all the relaxation elements, but you can also have a good workout and take classes, get a facial, and then go to the restaurant for a really nice dinner.”

Heffernan is far from the only one enjoying such healthful pleasures. There are 19,960 spas across the country—“places devoted to overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body, and spirit”—according to The International Spa Association (ISPA).

In 2012, the trade group reports, these spas generated about $14 billion in revenue thanks to 160 million visits, slight increases over figures from the previous year.

Andrea Foster, vice president and national director of spa and wellness consulting for PKF Consulting USA, in Boston, further defines the true spa as a place that provides “a relaxing and rejuvenating experience that includes massage, body treatments, and could also include facials, nutrition counseling, and fitness training.”

In short, hair and nail salons are not automatically spas, she says, nor “are the dental offices that say they have a massage chair.”
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Twin Farms offers an intimate setting in the woodlands of Vermont.

Foster’s company publishes the annual Trends® in the Hotel Spa Industry report. “We are seeing continued demand growth [for spas], and within that, there is a need for more skilled labor now for existing spas and for the projected spa growth,” she says. Also clear is a qualitative shift in overall demographics and, therefore, changes in spa services and new facilities. For one thing, more spa-goers are aging and, consequently, more likely to have disabilities, chronic conditions, and medical needs: they may want spa services to address challenges such as pain relief and physical rehabilitation. Or, that group wants to focus on strengthening their bodies to prevent injuries and maintain an active lifestyle. “With baby boomers aging, there is a growing need [for them] to incorporate into their lifestyles a wellness approach,” Foster says. “I think we will see increased demand for those services, and I expect to see the supply of spas with medical components grow at an appropriate pace.” Teens and young adults are also a growing spa customer base, as is the slowly rising number of male guests, who now account for between 20 and 25 percent of all spa visitors. “Typically,” Foster reports, “they are first taken by a female, and then realize the benefits and return by themselves.”

One “early adopter” is Manchester, Vermont, native Max Levis, M.T.S. ’11, a tutor...
in the Harvard psychology department. He grew up going to the Equinox Resort & Spa because it was near his parents’ hotel, The Wilburton Inn, and his mother is a long-time member who takes movement classes and gets facials, massages, and other treatments. He swims in the pool and loves the sauna and steam room, which, he asserts, are “definitely health benefits.” “Part of the fun is also sitting outside on a snowy day in the hot tub,” he adds. Equinox is “elegant and indulgent,” he allows, but it’s also “a healing place...it offers time and space for reflection. There’s a fire going and people are there to help you. It’s a place to let go of distractions—work, personal life, or the headaches we are carrying around with us. It’s a place to ease our burdens.”

Such gentle catering to the “mind, body, and spirit” is, arguably, especially important in New England, where residents often struggle with the transition from the slumberous wintry months to the energetic nature of spring.

Robin Heffernan began trying spas at Starwood Hotels while traveling for work. She found the treatments so helpful that she began sampling day spas in Greater Boston, including H2O, Exhale, Corbu, and Massage Envy. “My general philosophy is that I treat massage as I would diet and exercise or any other wellness activity, as more than a luxury event,” explains Heffernan, who also plans to return to the Norwich spa later this year. “I wholeheartedly regard the

Topnotch’s outdoor lounge has a roaring fire and mountain views.
relaxation experience and physical benefits of massage as essential to health and well-being."

New England’s hotel and resort spas provide just that through dedicated “get-away vacations” that come without the added hassle and unpredictability of airplane travel—or even having to waste too many hours in a car. The spas range widely in price (roughly from $250 to more than $1,000 per person, per night) and degree of luxuriousness. But many also offer all-inclusive packages (including meals), seasonal rates, or special deals with ad hoc fees for various services, all of which can bring the cost down.

Foster notes that New England’s spas tend to focus on “simple, beautiful spaces and excellent services,” whereas elsewhere “you may see spas topping each other in how fancy or glamorous they can be.” Perhaps characteristically, “based on typical spending patterns and behavior,” she adds, “by nature New Englanders are more,—I don’t know if frugal is the word, but they tend to be more conservative in their behavior, and in their spending. They want value—and to see results.”

The Berkshires and locales around New York City, including places throughout Connecticut, have become known as “spa destinations,” Foster reports. In Connecticut, for example, the Mayflower Inn & Spa is another popular destination. The Berkshires have three distinct spa resorts located in and around the town of Lenox (also the home of Tanglewood). Canyon Ranch is an adult-only “destination spa” focused on health and wellness, that includes optional classes as well as medical evaluation and treatments. Cranwell is more of a traditional resort, with golf, family activities—and a sizable spa. “The wide range of spa services are an option on your vacation, but may not be the primary purpose of the stay,” Foster explains. Kripalu, an epicenter for yoga and mindfulness, also offers body treatments, but in a less obviously luxurious atmosphere than the other two spas boast.

Further north, Foster notes, are the high-end Omni Mount Washington Resort, in New Hampshire, the White Barn Inn, in Maine, and several others in Vermont: Twin Farms, the Equinox Resort & Spa, Topnotch Resort, and The Woodstock Inn & Resort, among others.

New England spas seem to be thriving and even growing, in terms of added services and lodgings. Canyon Ranch, which opened in 1989, has a 100,000-square-foot spa and additional lodgings. In addition to indoor and outdoor pools, tennis courts, a running track, and fitness classes, the resort offers medical evaluations, spa treatments, and even, within the last several years, the increasingly popular “metaphysical” consults (e.g., astrology, Tarot card and clairvoyant readings, numerology, and handwriting analysis). Laurie Matthews, Ed.M. ’79, M.B.A. ’83, found a special rate that enabled her to spend her first spa va
Spas around New England

All the establishments below offer visitors the chance to “get away from it all” and linger, lounge, and otherwise soak up the spa experience during an overnight (or multiple-night) stay.

**Canyon Ranch**
Lenox, Massachusetts
www.canyonranch.com/lenox
413-637-4100

**Chatham Bars Inn**
Chatham, Massachusetts
www.chathambarsinn.com
800-527-4884

**Cranwell**
Lenox, Massachusetts
www.cranwell.com
413-637-1364

**Equinox Resort & Spa**
Manchester Village, Vermont
www.equinoxresort.com
800-362-4747

**Kripalu**
Stockbridge, Massachusetts
www.kripalu.org
866-200-5203

**Mayflower Inn & Spa**
Washington, Connecticut
www.mayflowerinn.com
860-868-9466

**Omni Mount Washington Resort**
Bretton Woods, New Hampshire
www.omnihotels.com/mtwashington
603-278-1000

**Saybrook Point Inn & Spa**
Old Saybrook, Connecticut
www.saybrook.com
860-395-2000

**The Spa at Norwich Inn**
Norwich, Connecticut
www.thespaatnorwichinn.com
860-886-2401

**Topnotch Resort**
Stowe, Connecticut
www.topnotchresort.com
802-253-8585

**Twin Farms**
Barnard, Vermont
www.twinfarms.com
802-234-9999

**Wentworth by the Sea**
Portsmouth, New Hampshire
www.wentworth.com
888-252-6888

**The White Barn Inn**
Kennebunk, Maine
www.whitebarninn.com
207-967-2321

**The Woodstock Inn & Resort**
Woodstock, Vermont
www.woodstockinn.com
802-457-1100

Matthews, a director in the Harvard Business School’s career and professional development office, has returned for the semi-annual Gotta Dance program ever since. She has also enjoyed the spa’s daily hikes, a tai chi workshop, a labyrinth on its well-manicured grounds, or just relaxing in the café lounge. All that, and spa treatments: one day it’s hot-stone massage, the next day it’s deep-tissue work. “Canyon Ranch is phenomenal at making you feel taken care of,” she says. “There, I am not just in touch with my body, but I’m of a more quiet mind and surrounded by beauty, looking out at the Berkshire Hills.”

The experience, however, is more than mere pampering. Her periodic retreats are not really what many people call “spa vacations,” Matthews adds. It’s more like “an immersion in an active, healthy experience,” she says, and reflects “a gift to myself.” As the April Gotta Dance program nears, she is ready and waiting in the wings. “As mothers, wives, partners, parents, children of elderly parents, as managers and bosses, and co-workers,” she adds, “we can be more productive and better with others when we ourselves are in balance. My philosophy is a twist on the golden rule: It’s important to give unto ourselves as we give unto others.”

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