



USA TODAY
A GANNETT COMPANY

Five myths about hotel spas

Everett Potter, Special for USA TODAY 7 a.m. EDT October 6, 2015



Hotel spas are not only important to many travelers but, in some cases, have become destinations in themselves, thanks to massive amounts of capital spent on upgrading and expanding facilities and hiring well-trained staff. But not all hotel spas or the treatments they offer are created equally. Here are five myths about hotel spas to guide you the next time you need some pampering.

1. Hotel spa treatments have become prohibitively expensive.

It's easy to spend a small fortune on a few spa treatments, agrees Melisse Gelula, co-founder and editorial director of [Well+Good](#). "There are places where you spend \$500 or more on a combo platter of several services for a bespoke spa ritual. But those not on a honeymoon splurge will find so many more options at the affordable end than ever."

Many hotel websites will not only list the spa treatments on offer but the prices as well, making it easy for the price-sensitive spa-goer to comparison shop. But Gelula, a journalist who has spent years reporting on the spa industry, says that there other money-saving strategies as well.

"Often, combos are the way to go," she says. "I look for a massages-facial duo at spas, because often that can save you around \$75, or I'll book a facial that comes with a foot and scalp massage. Sometimes there's nothing like a straight-up massage, though, and you don't need all the extra bells and whistles unless you're a hot stone or aromatherapy junkie."

Of course, there is the entire resort spa experience itself, which can be looked at something that really enhances the treatment. "At a resort spa, guests have an experience in addition to the massage or facial," says Kim Gagliardo, spa director at the OH! Spa at [Ocean House](#), a resort hotel on the coast of Rhode Island. "There are beautifully appointed spaces, highly trained therapists and amenities offered throughout the facility."

2. Resort spas are usually much better than day spas.

It sure seems that way. After all, the resorts themselves are often in breathtaking locations and offer luxurious facilities. Gagliardo of Ocean House agrees, noting that her facility “employs master therapists who are highly trained in their specialties as well as our five-star hospitality standards. We spend a lot of time training our team and ensuring the guests have a memorable visit.”

Looking at the lavish magazine and online spreads devoted to resort spas or delving into a resort’s web site might convince you that nothing can compare to the luxury on view. But apparently that’s not always the case.

“Resort spas have to work really hard to keep up with what’s happening on the day-spa level in cities where people are increasingly savvy about skin-care products and healing practices,” says Gelula, who lives in New York. “Some resort spas really focus on being current, hiring great therapists and facialists,” but may “use products that aren’t as appealing or special as what we all have access to at home. I think there’s more innovation on the day-spa level these days, but then day spas vary wildly and finding a great one can be tough, too.”

3. If you’re not sore the next day, then the treatment wasn’t really that good.

For years, experiencing next-day soreness seemed to be the litmus test of a really good massage, proof positive that the therapist had really gone deep and worked muscles that really needed to be worked. But could it be that all that soreness was just the result of a less-than-ideal massage?

“Why should you be sore?” Gelula asks. “It’s not a new workout. Seriously, there are lots of ways to feel better, (like) de-stressing, for example, or increased energy. But then if you go for a deep-tissue or shiatsu massage, those can be all about digging out your knots and you may just be sore after.”

Gagliardo says that from a therapist’s point of view, “it is a challenge to ‘fix’ something in an hour when muscle tension and stress may have been building for weeks or months. “We have created some massage services aimed at providing deep-tissue work without leaving the guest in pain.”

As an example, she cites a Lavender Relief Massage, which begins with a lavender herbal balm applied to the upper back and a heat pack to help infuse the herbs into the body and relax the muscles before the therapist begins to massage the area. OH! Spa also uses arnica oil, which helps heal the muscle and alleviate pain afterward. In short, this is not about soreness.

4. The effects of a massage or other spa treatments tend to disappear very quickly.

This is not an uncommon complaint. You go away on vacation, you book a spa treatment, and you feel great afterwards, but the next day, you feel pretty much the same. The problem may not be with the treatment but with you, the frequency with which you get spa treatments and the kind of shape you're in. Gelula points out that "one treatment can be life-changing for some people — they are healing services after all — or it can be the equivalent of going to the gym once. You have to keep going to see results."

This doesn't mean that you need to stop contributing to your 401K to afford massage treatments. It means that "anything you can do to help manage your stress helps, and booking spa time where your cellphone is tucked away in a locker while you're working on 'me time' is incredibly important, not to mention the physical aspects of improved flexibility and injury prevention. I think of spa treatments a bit like meditation; they're a place where I schedule time to focus on nothing. And on the skin-care front, those who get regular facials tend to have fewer skin issues."

Gagliardo says the effects of a good massage go way beyond the treatment itself and has a lot to do with being in beautiful surroundings.

5. A massage may make you feel better, but there are no real medical benefits.

For those looking to seriously improve their health, they need to turn to their own doctor for advice on this one. For spa advocates like Gelula, the answer is simple.

"Most people don't want a massage because their doctor says they should do it," she says. "They want one because it feels great."

Gagliardo agrees, adding that "a sense of well-being is an essential part of being healthy."