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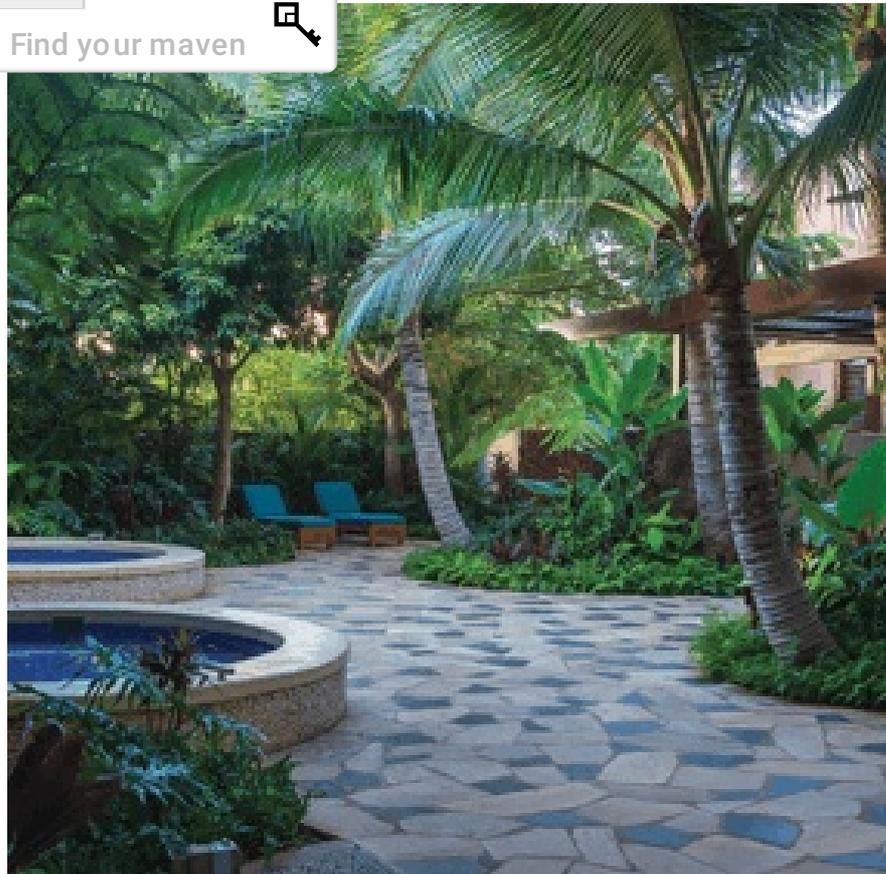
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by **Women's Health**

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Hotel spa experiences cater to women stress reduction and overall wellness.

You have done the research. You have made a plan. Tickets are purchased and

rooms are booked. You are on your way. Vacation starts now. In this scenario, what is your goal for what happens next? If your vision has you taking a step back from your busy life, reducing your stress level, and reconnecting with your body and soul, you are not alone.

For many women vacation serves as an ideal time to focus on mind and body wellness and consciously aim to reduce stress levels, which are chronically high among American women. In fact, research reported by the American Psychological Association illustrates the stress burden that women carry today: we are more likely than men to report having a great deal of stress, many of us have seen our stress increase significantly in the past five years, and we are more likely than men to report physical and emotional symptoms of stress.¹ The impact of stress can be significant. Almost every system in the body can be influenced by chronic stress, and chronic stress can suppress the body's immune system and cause a wide variety of illnesses, ranging from headaches to gastrointestinal disorders to heart disease.²

While the ideal itinerary for stress relief varies widely among female travelers, many find that seeking a vacation destination that includes spa and wellness services can provide the perfect opportunity to commit to self-care and make significant strides in stress reduction. The popularity of these services at hotels and resorts has resulted in spa services' becoming almost compulsory among hospitality providers. This means that no matter your vacation plans—whether you are planning a family vacation, a solo retreat, or a girlfriends' getaway—you are guaranteed to find a lodging option that offers services to help you reduce stress and improve your physical and emotional well-being.

Plan with Purpose

So you have made the decision to seek a hotel or resort that features spa services. Where do you start your search? According to the 2014 U.S. Spa Industry Study conducted by the International SPA Association (ISPA), there are 1,760 resort/hotel spas. Lynne McNees, president of the ISPA, says this number reflects the demand among travelers for facilities and services that will cater to their aim of stress reduction: "The number one reason men and women worldwide visit a spa is to learn how to manage their stress," she says.

The offerings and facilities available vary significantly from one hotel to the

next, from large treatment facilities offering an extensive menu that might include clinical visits with health experts and cooking classes, to hotels that simply provide on-site massage services. The key for women who are planning a vacation, McNees says, is to research options carefully and have a good idea of what you are looking for in a vacation spa experience: “First ask yourself, *Why am I going to a spa? What do I want from the experience? What do I visualize when I picture an ideal spa vacation?* Doing your homework ensures that you have a great experience.”

As you answer these questions and determine what you are looking for, online searches through the ISPA (experiencespa.com) and Spafinder (spafinder.com) can help you review various options and gather information. If you are traveling with your family or with friends who already have a hotel or resort in mind, contact that hotel and ask about its spa services.

Damien Craft, senior spa director for the Americas at The Spa at Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village in Westlake Village, California, says that contacting the spa directly and asking questions can help ensure that you get what you need from your visit. “Ask detailed questions when you make reservations and tell them what you’re looking for,” he says. “Reservation agents at a spa generally know the staff’s qualifications well and can direct you toward a therapist who can meet your specific needs. Many times different therapists specialize in certain techniques and can serve you best.” And, he adds, be sure to ask about the facility itself and the amenities provided: “Get the full picture before you arrive. Be as specific as possible so you end up with the experience you’re looking for.”

Embrace the Experience

Once you have committed to dedicated spa time on your vacation, the next step is to fully embrace the opportunity for rest and relaxation and enjoy every moment of this gift you have given yourself. Whether it is a single treatment during an active vacation with your kids or a week-long dedicated spa experience, living in the moment and appreciating all the sensory details of your spa time will allow you to see the most significant benefit in terms of stress reduction and revitalization.

For many the design of the spa space itself will play a major role in setting the tone and helping maintain relaxation throughout treatment and rest time. At Lanikai—a Disney Resort & Spa on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, the

sensory experience created by design details based on Hawaiian art and cultural tradition embraces spa guests from their first moments in the space. After leaving the spa's foyer, guests are guided by their therapist down a curving hallway lit with blue, shimmering light and leading to a shallow circular pool, over which is suspended a single glass raindrop. Having been presented on their arrival with a stone engraved with an intention for their experience—balance, gratitude, or knowledge, for example—guests are encouraged to take a moment at the pool to toss the stone into the water before proceeding to their treatment. The thoughtful pause is one of the many details of the Laniwai experience that help guests engage in their experience and take time to reflect.

Laniwai Spa Director Lucia Amasio and a team of Walt Disney Imagineers developed the design for the space with the intention that it would be firmly rooted in Hawaiian art and culture, nature, and spiritual elements, transporting visitors on a journey of physical and emotional wellness. Throughout the design process, Amasio says, the concept of a rainbow—that spiritually significant moment when sunlight, water, and sky converge—served as the central symbol from which many details followed. “The idea was to incorporate water features, clouds, and curvature of the walls,” Amasio says, “all elements playing with the concepts of light and rain.” The result is a physical space that creates a sense of protected peace for visitors, a transporting experience that fosters calm from the first moments in the spa.

To the physical design, the Laniwai team added a treatment menu similarly reflective of the unique natural elements and cultural heritage of Hawaii. “Aulani has the highest level of respect for native culture,” Amasio says, “and our healing story reflects that aloha spirit—that desire of Hawaiians to share with you their culture.” The spa menu includes such treatments as the traditional Hawaiian Lomilomi massage, during which a therapist uses polished lomilomi sticks to help apply pressure and ease tension, and the Hana Pihaku Lomilomi, which incorporates heated stones to ease muscle relaxation. Many of the body treatments and facials incorporate Hawaiian ingredients and signature scents such as mango, plumeria, hibiscus, ginger, lime, and vanilla.

Throughout the experience at Laniwai, the sensory details are matched by something less tangible but equally important: a staff that exudes `olu`olu—the Hawaiian concept of graciousness and welcome. Amasio says this

generosity of spirit and collaborative work among the therapists and staff is key to making guests feel cared for and relaxed. This attention to the internal function of the spa is reflected in the overall sense of peace that guests experience.

The Laniwai experience, which exists amid the busy, dynamic Aulani resort, is indicative of the trend among hotels and resorts to offer the opportunity for respite and relaxation alongside other experiences. “In building the resort, we wanted to be sure there was something for everyone,” Amasio says. “And we knew that needed to include a wellness component.”

The design and the treatment menu at Laniwai encourage guests to exist in the moment. Wherever your spa experience takes you, truly appreciating each detail and your physical and emotional responses will enhance your experience. If you have taken the step to schedule spa time, be sure you are fully present: think about why you are there; breathe deeply and enjoy the sensory experiences; don't rush. And, when you do leave the spa and head out on the next vacation activity or board the plane to go home, think about how you can incorporate the lessons of your experience into your daily life to see ongoing benefit.

A Launching Point for Long-Term Wellness

Opportunities to rest and relax through spa experiences like those offered at Laniwai are key for those pursuing stress reduction, but so are more-active pursuits—physical and emotional exercise—that can translate into long-term lifestyle changes. Taking advantage of spa time at a hotel or resort can present a valuable opportunity to reset and launch healthy living habits that you can maintain when your vacation comes to an end.

“Vacation presents an opportunity for women who maybe haven't incorporated wellness into their lives—it's a great place to start,” says Amasio. “Often people are so inundated with responsibilities at home that they just don't have time.” She loves to see women visiting Aulani taking advantage of an early-morning yoga class on the beach or a paddleboard fitness class—something they might never do at home but that can trigger a new desire for health and fitness to maintain long-term. “Wellness can start with baby steps,” she says. “Maybe you just walk five minutes in the morning while you're here; the next morning you might walk 10— and when you realize how good it feels, you might keep it up at home.”

There is clear benefit to a vacation that incorporates health and wellness in this way, as a catalyst for long-term lifestyle improvement. At California Health & Longevity Institute (CHLI) in Westlake Village, guests are offered an extensive array of services—medicine, nutrition, fitness, life balance, and spa—that together create a “lifestyle transformation destination.” Enhancing quality of life and promoting longevity are the driving forces behind the CHLI 360-degree approach to health and wellness. Located within the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village, CHLI serves both destination spa travelers and those staying at the hotel for business or vacation travel in the Los Angeles area.

Paulette Lambert, RD, CDE, director of nutrition at CHLI, is a member of the expert team that works with guests interested in implementing lifestyle changes to promote long-term health. Lambert provides nutritional counseling, evaluating guests’ diets and suggesting practical, sustainable, “high-level changes” to ensure long-term health. For women, she says, this often means educating them about caloric needs and portion size to help them understand the components of a healthy diet: “Women often think they’re eating well, and they may have an idea of what they’re supposed to be doing, but there are issues and misperceptions: they may be carb-phobic and eating too much protein, for example. Sugar and alcohol are also a big problem for women. We try to emphasize a balanced diet.” These concepts are reiterated in CHLI’s Wellness Kitchen, where Lambert teaches guests healthy cooking techniques and provides additional information they can take home to implement changes in their daily lives.

Balance is a key concept in the offerings at CHLI, which also include fitness assessments and training, medical screenings and consultations, dental services, and all the spa treatments offered by The Spa at the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village. In addition, Life-Balance sessions with psychologists are available to help guests devise strategies to optimize relationships, enhance career planning, and address behavior and conflict-resolution topics.

Ilana Kukoff, PhD, a lifestyle consultant at CHLI, says that these Life-Balance sessions can help guests assess their cognitive health and develop a plan for ongoing care, if necessary. Dr. Kukoff says that her approach incorporates her belief that the spectrum of the human condition includes “big ticket items”—those events that leave your world transformed overnight (the death of a loved one, an accident, or a sudden illness, for example)— and the

common, everyday occurrences (such as marriage, divorce, and parenting) that we all go through but that can nonetheless present significant challenges. By offering guests insight into the impact of these events, big and small, and strategizing about long-term steps, Dr. Kukoff provides mind-body balance. “This is your point of entry,” she says. “If your cognitive health is not in a good place, you’ll have difficulty with the rest of your health, as well.”

Whether your vacation wellness experience consists of one inspiring fitness class, time in the spa that allows you to relax and reflect, or more-intensive lifestyle modification counseling like that offered at CHLI, the physical and emotional benefits of a vacation that incorporates wellness and spa time can go a long way.

Return Renewed

Research into the benefits of a vacation that provides relaxation is clear: getting away and devoting time to relaxation increases happiness,³ reduces stress, and improves family relationships—among other benefits.⁴

Incorporating spa and wellness activities on vacations can help women make the most of their time away, leaving them feeling rejuvenated and relaxed, ready to return to their lives with a new or renewed sense of well-being. The activities, services, and elements that will create the ideal spa and wellness recipe for relaxation will vary from woman to woman, but the end result should be the same: an overall sense of well-being.

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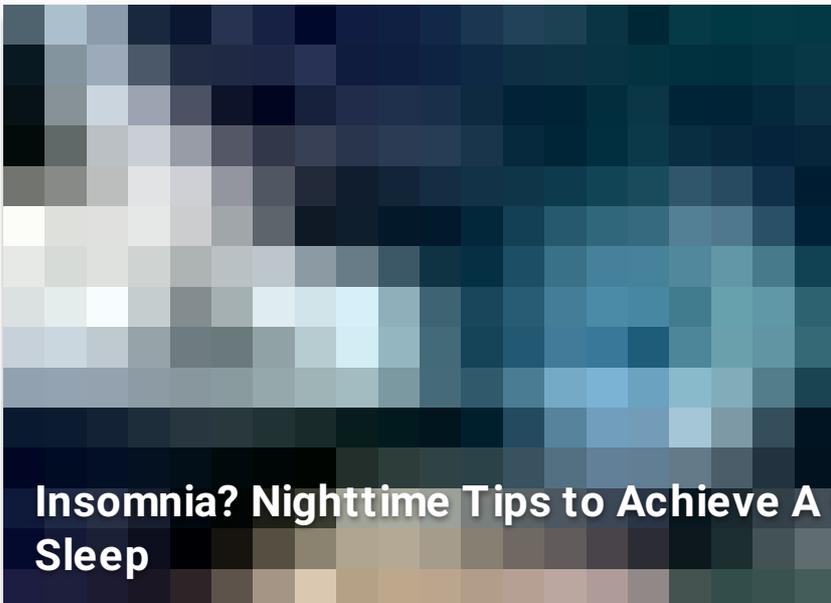
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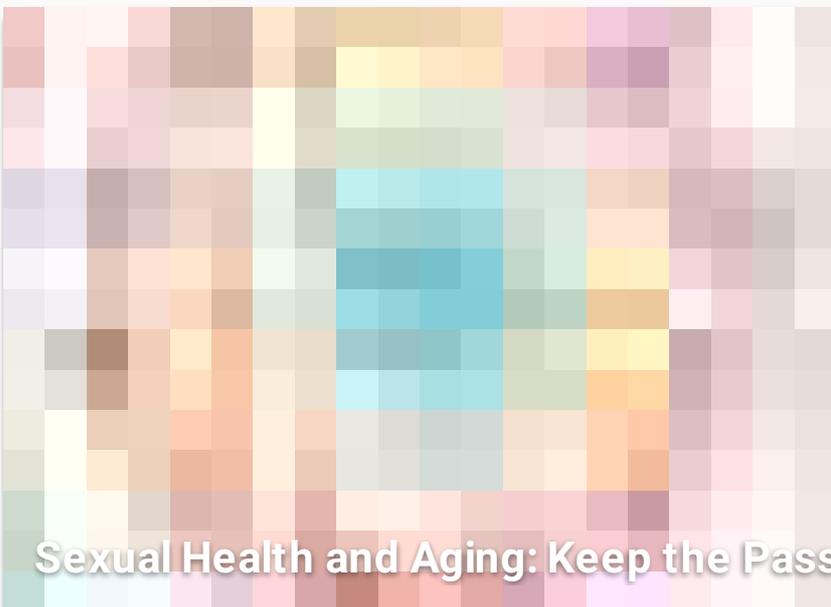
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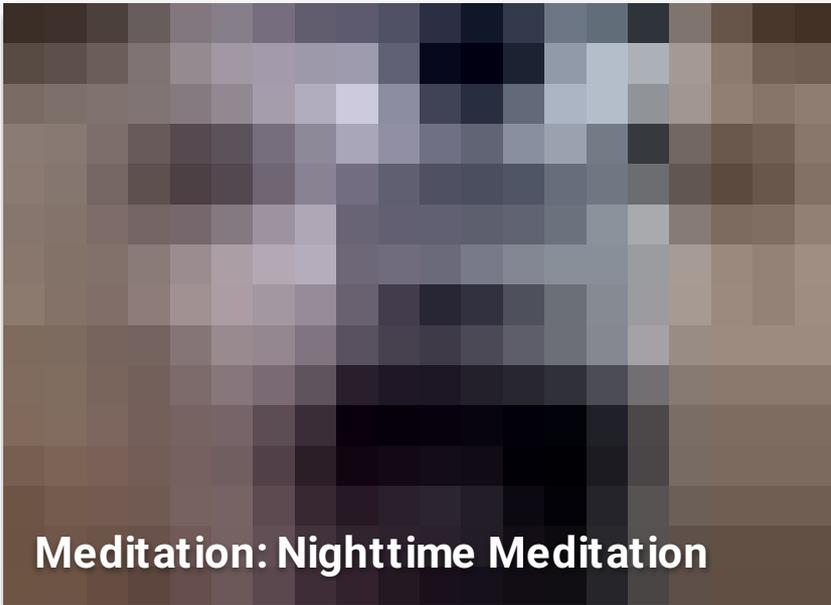
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