

WESTGLOW SPA: SLOW DOWN AND RELAX

BY MARY GILBERT Special to the News & Record Jan 28, 1995

Spa enthusiasts can find Westglow, a European-style spa, in the North Carolina mountains.

The one remaining cookie has been consumed, the last sausage ball has been savored and the final bite of plum pudding polished off. The holidays are over, but you may be left with more than fond memories as a reminder of the good times.

Like the average person, you may have gained five pounds or more. If you entered the season as a regular exerciser, chances are that maintaining your fitness program dropped in priority behind the rounds of shopping and partying. The stress you experience throughout the year suddenly became magnified with the more hectic schedule. The holidays seem to grant tacit acceptance of overindulgence, and that can leave you feeling sluggish, unmotivated and in need of relaxation and rejuvenation.

The remedy? A visit to a spa.

Spas are rapidly becoming the vacation destination for those interested in a getaway that lays the foundation for a balanced, healthy lifestyle. Far removed from the image of 'fat farms' adhering to a spartan diet and a boot camp mentality, spas today offer state-of-the-art services promoting the benefits of proper nutrition, moderate exercise and emotional well being, often in luxurious surroundings amid breathtaking scenery.

Spas are fun, exciting and a source of new adventures and experiences - just what a vacation should be.

According to Frank van Putten, president of Spa Finders, a New York City-based free referral and reservation service, spa-going not a trend but a logical response to needing to cope with the demands of society. He estimates that some 1.5 million people visit spas each year, and that number is growing.

'Originally, spas were the first form of tourism,' he said. 'In the 19th century, doctors in Europe prescribed stays at thermal springs, known for their healing waters, for royalty and the aristocracy. They were the only ones who could afford what was in essence a vacation with a medical purpose.'

Early American settlers bathed in a variety of places and the tradition of building grand resort establishments around hot thermal waters took hold.

Spas came into their own in the 1980s. With the advent of more comprehensive spas, day spas, and fitness and beauty facilities at hotels, spa visits became less costly because of the greater accessibility. Spas have become both a temporary respite from the daily grind as well as a place to change one's life. Generally, most of the visitors are women, but men now account for 25 percent of all spa guests.

“Today, we lead stressful lives with stressful jobs,” van Putten said. “We are getting away from nature. We eat on the run. We don’t focus on ourselves, and we have less personal contact with people, partly because of computers, phones and faxes. Spas help us feel better and encourage us to take responsibility for our own well-being.”

Just a two-hour drive northwest of the Piedmont Triad is North Carolina’s only spa. Serenely nestled in the shadows of Grandfather Mountain outside of Blowing Rock on U.S. 221 is Westglow, a European-style spa established in 1991 and offering a full range of life enhancing programs and services.

Westglow is situated on a 20-acre estate, once the summer retreat of noted writer and artist Elliott Daingerfield and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The hilltop spa continues to use the name he gave to the property, so called because of the beautiful sunsets he enjoyed over the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Built in 1916, Daingerfield’s home, now the guest house, is a stately and elegant combination of Greek Revival and ante-bellum style architecture.

The present owner, Glynda Valentine, took great care to preserve the historical integrity of Daingerfield’s time.

Nearly 85 percent of the furnishings are the original estate pieces. In the library, guests may peruse the 2,500 volumes from Daingerfield’s own collection. The refurbished parlor is available for small conferences and social events. The sun porch and the formal dining room serve as the main dining area. Two cottages across the roadway also accommodate guests.

“The setting lends itself to a step back in time,” said Jean Teague, Westglow’s general manager. “We try to be simpler, less automated. We had long discussions on whether we should even have a computer in the registration area.”

First-time visitors to Westglow should not let the intimate and gentle ambience of the place deceive them into the notion that Westglow is behind the times in spa programs and services.

Westglow boasts a state-of-the-art Life Enhancement Center that was built to match the style and grace of the manor house. The facility contains the latest in advanced fitness and therapeutic equipment, indoor pool, outdoor tennis court, whirlpools, saunas, body treatment rooms, hair and nail salon, fitness center with Cybex weight machines, cardiovascular conditioning center, aerobics studio, men’s and women’s lounges, private shower and dressing areas, and a poolside cafe.

Westglow prides itself on its hiking program. Daily hikes on trails in the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains are deemed trail therapy because they blend a group workout with an opportunity to talk and share experiences.

Westglow also features such specialized services as massage, aromatherapy, foot reflexology, a fitness assessment paired with a personally tailored exercise program, diet consultation, and stress management counseling.

Westglow advocates a moderate, holistic approach to health and wellness. A ratio of three staff people for every guest ensures personal attention.

Teague said the philosophy is “to focus on serving our clients and their schedules. We help them to assess their needs and realize what they want, and then we try to fulfill those needs using regular physical activity, proper nutrition and relaxation techniques

and body treatments. Most guests select a mix of these activities, or they are free to simply relax and enjoy the time away from home or to unload their problems on us.'

Spa cuisine is a specialty at Westglow. Chef Marcus Badon uses the freshest, highest quality ingredients prepared in a healthy manner with less fat, salt, sugar and heat. However, if a guest requests such no-nos as caffeine or salt, the staff graciously offers it. Even alcohol is allowed, provided the guests bring their own because of county liquor restrictions. As part of the open and casual atmosphere, Badon welcomes guests to visit the kitchen, where he offers advice on healthy cooking.

A typical meal might include lentil soup, crab mousse, and a choice of trout with kale and wild mushrooms, chicken with pasta, or sauteed beef with vegetables. Dessert might be apple strudel, seemingly fat laden but actually not.

``The evening program is the dining experience,' Teague said. ``A focal point is in the presentation of the food. The chef garnishes each plate with edible flowers and herbs grown in Westglow's garden to create a piece of art. Westglow even has created a signature drink of raspberry and apple juices available at each meal.

``We encourage our guests to slow down, relax and be more conscious of what they are eating. When they don't rush, they have time to make friendships with the other guests.'

Teague said that the overall goal is for guests to take Westglow home with them.

``We want our guests to leave with the knowledge that they are responsible for themselves, that they need to manage stress, to eat properly and to stay physically active for a healthy lifestyle. We know we have done our jobs when guests tell us that their experience at Westglow rewrote their lives.'

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more information about spas in the United States and around the world, call Spa Finders at (212) 924-6800 or (800) 255-7727. Westglow can be reached at (704) 295-4463 or (800) 562-0807.

WANT TO GO?

Westglow Spa has several packages, ranging from a day-long program that includes a spa service, such as a massage or a facial, to a weeklong program that emphasizes hiking or weight management. Additional services are available on an a la carte basis.

Day package: Includes the use of all spa resort facilities: indoor swimming pool, whirlpool, sauna, fitness classes, cardiovascular center and weight room. Lunch is served at the poolside cafe. Cost ranges from \$99 for one spa service to \$199 for three services.

All-inclusive program: Offers guests full access to Westglow's amenities and specialized professional services. Accommodations are either in bedroom suites in the Manor House or in cottages. Guests receive three meals daily and can participate in daily supervised sessions in the fitness center, unlimited fitness classes, various group activities and daily supervised hikes. Prices range from \$559 for the two-night program with three spa or fitness services to \$1,769 for the seven-night program with nine spa or fitness services. Prices quoted are for single occupancy.

Hiking/outdoor adventure program: Runs from Saturday to Saturday May 15 through Oct. 15. Besides the accommodations and amenities, guests also receive: daily supervised hikes, one supervised overnight camping with dinner and breakfast at

campsite, one supervised white-water rafting expedition, one supervised horseback ride, one hike with picnic lunch, canoeing on a lake, and five spa or fitness services. Cost is \$1,869 for single occupancy.

Weight management program: Runs from Saturday to Saturday year round and offers guests a structured, comprehensive nutrition, exercise and behavioral program, and a broad understanding of the relationship of nutrition and fitness to weight management and disease. Besides the accommodations and amenities, guests also receive: daily supervised hikes, fitness assessment and exercise prescription, personal trainer, nutrition assessment and diet consultation, a supermarket tour, a cooking in the '90s class, behavior modification session, dining out and recipe adaptation, and a session on the physiological aspect of weight management. Cost is \$1,999 for single occupancy.

Costs: State and local taxes are additional. Gratuities for all restaurant and spa services are covered in a 10 percent service charge based on their standard tariff rates.

Westglow accepts American Express, MasterCard, Visa and personal checks.