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Travel

Monterey County



Sanctuary sustained

After 25 years, the country's largest marine refuge remains an upwelling of wonder and discovery for scientists and sightseers. Page 8

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MONTEREY COUNTY



The patio at Spa Alila, which has cabanas with clear panels that allow views of Big Sur's wooded hillsides.

Photos by Mason Trinca / Special to The Chronicle

Warm up to winter at 5 delightful spas

Monterey, Carmel and Big Sur are no less beautiful in winter than in any other season. Exploring their outdoor attractions in the cool, rainy season — whether you're whale watching on Monterey Bay or spying on sea lions at Point Lobos — provides the perfect excuse to warm up later at one of the region's renowned spas.

These five welcoming oases draw on techniques from all over the world, while offering an ambiance that's unmistakably true to their distinctive settings, from urban Monterey to rustic Big Sur. Here are their best ways to shake off any chill and emerge renewed for the new year.

— Jeanne Cooper, travel@sfbchronicle.com

A sauna is shown on the patio of Spa Alila at the Ventana Big Sur in Big Sur. The resort off Highway 1 recently reopened after renovations.



CINQ MONDES, CARMEL

Tucked inside the casbah of Carmel Crossroads lies an authentic Moroccan hammam with tiled steam room, shower, heated stone massage table and bench-lined lounge area. A 20-minute "ceremony" session here focuses on multisensory relaxation: Clients breathe in fragrant steam under soft colored lights. The two-hour "ritual" adds a body scrub with traditional black olive soap, which exfoliates and moisturizes; a North African rhasoul poultice, a full-body application of mineral clay that softens and tones the skin; and a massage. The hammam is open to singles or couples of both sexes; women can book "beauty parties" for up to five.

118 Crossroads Blvd., Carmel. (831) 625-4410, www.cinq-mondesspacarmel.com. Hammam ceremony, \$45; ritual, \$295; beauty party, \$200 for three, \$50 per additional person.

THE SPA AT PEBBLE BEACH

Imported from Germany, the dry flotation beds here create zero-gravity heated cocoons to enjoy during a 45-minute body wrap, in which clients are gently swaddled after a coating of moisturizing or detoxifying oils. A shorter 25-minute "restorative nap" or guided meditation session in a flotation bed is also an option. Women can begin with a 25-minute water experience: Soak in a private tub, then relax in a sauna, steam or salt inhalation room before rinsing off in the spa's multihead shower. Open to men and women, the greenhouse-style Sanctuary offers plush seating around a fire pit for further relaxation.

1518 Cypress Dr., Pebble Beach. (866) 993-6947, www.pebble-beach.com/the-spa-at-pebble-beach. Flotation wraps, \$170 for one, \$260 for two; guided meditation and naps, \$25. Women's water experience, \$50 (\$30 with additional treatment.)

SPA ALILA, BIG SUR

The spa at Ventana Big Sur debuted Nov. 10, a few weeks after the remodeled resort's reopening. A signature here is an Indonesia-inspired therapy called lulur, which originated among Balinese rice farmers, who sought to warm the body, soothe sore joints and alleviate skin issues with a mix of sandalwood, fennel seed, star anise and other herbs.

The two-hour treatment includes an hour-long massage, body scrub, skin-softening body mask and mini-facial. New outdoor cabanas with clear panels allow you to soak in the views of Big Sur's wooded hillsides as well as the warmth.

At Ventana Big Sur, 48123 Hwy. 1, Big Sur. (800) 628-6500, www.ventanabigsur.com/spa. Lulur, \$350.

SPA ON THE PLAZA, MONTEREY

Central European spas have relied on moor mud for generations to counteract the effects of chilly winters. This spa's 55-minute moor mud body wrap starts with a private bath and then an application of heated mud,

which contains essential oils and minerals that smooth skin and soothe muscles. After you're unwrapped from a cozy chrysalis of blankets, a Vichy water massage rinses away the mess and revives energy for the next excursion.

In Portola Hotel & Spa, 201 Alvarado St., Monterey. (831) 847-9000, <http://spaontheplaza.com>. Moor mud wrap, \$120.



Portola Hotel & Spa

Services offered at Spa on the Plaza.

REFUGE, CARMEL VALLEY

Eucalyptus steam room, cedar sauna, hot tubs, fire pits — the choices for taking the chill off are many at this 2-acre, indoor-outdoor hydrotherapy circuit next to Carmel Valley Athletic Club. But it's the ability to temper the heat with cold plunges and waterfall pools, plus relaxation in zero-gravity recliners and Adirondack chairs, that makes the Refuge truly unique. The coed oasis enhances tranquility with restful lighting, music and a policy of "quiet enjoyment" (i.e. no cell phones or loud chatting) and white robes (rent or bring your own).

27300 Rancho San Carlos Road, Carmel. (831) 620-7360, www.refuge.com. 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. \$46 admission; \$55 with robe rental and bottled water.