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RELAX RENEW RECHARGE

*Winter treatments at Bay Area spas focus
on restoring body and soul. Page 6*

Cover Story



SPAS SOOTHE WINTER BLUES

By Valerie Demicheva

To kick off 2014, the Year of the Horse, we suggest paying homage to this spirited animal by getting serious about relaxation. After all, even the toughest show ponies have groomers. Finding a reason to pamper yourself in winter is simple: Even without a polar vortex, Hayes Valley in January can chill the bones, and city life can wear down the spirit. Whether you're looking to shed toxins by way of birch leaves or buff yourself shimmery with diamond dust, we have just what the doctor — or energy healer — ordered. Resist the urge to hibernate. Opt for a day of rejuvenation at any of these five beloved San Francisco spas that offer a bevy of cures for the winter blues as varied as the city's microclimates.

EARTHBODY DAY SPA

To escape the gray palette of January, visit Earthbody Day Spa, an intimate space that welcomes its visitors with bright gold tones and decor influenced by Buddhism. Earthbody's seasonal treatment, the Winter Ritual (\$189, 1.5 hours), was designed by Denmo Ibrahim, the spa's CEO, to restore



The communal Japanese baths at the Kabuki Springs & Spa, open different days for women



tranquillity with traditional Chinese medicine and Western herbalism.

"My mental, physical and emotional health struggle most during the fall and winter. As the cold days settle, inner balance becomes a daily challenge," writes Ibrahim, a healer, bodywork practitioner and wellness educator, on the spa's website. "From the view of Ayurveda, this is the power of nature. The seasons have a profound impact on us. If we prepare for the seasonal cycle, we can stay uplifted and aligned."

The Winter Ritual includes a ginger body buff, face and scalp therapy, acupressure, a massage using warm Dream Body Oil (\$48, 4 ounces) and a self-care wellness kit to continue the restoration at home. One of the key ingredients in the Dream oil, created locally by Ibrahim, is *Artemisia vulgaris* (mugwort), a medicinal plant with a reputation for evoking the dream state and awakening intuition.

ARCHIMEDES BANYA

For those seeking a more social ritual, a trip to Archimedes Banya may bring you closer to your fellow spa seeker with its pools, saunas and lounge — each large enough to accommodate about 10 people at a time. The



Earthbody

Earthbody CEO and founder Denmo Ibrahim mixes an herbal treatment for the Hayes Valley spa, which blends traditional Chinese medicine and Western herbalism.

patrons at Banya run the gamut from groups of young techies to families celebrating birthdays in the communal areas. In Russian — Banya owner Mikhail Brodsky's native language — Banya means "bathtub," and the multilevel edifice lives up to its name with several soaking options, including a warm water pool, Jacuzzis, private soak tubs and a cold water plunge.



Visitors to the spa at the Mandarin Oriental hotel in San Francisco's Financial District can use the spa's treatments, which are continuously evolving, use the Mandarin Oriental's signature

A dip in ice-cold water is a New Year's tradition, and at Banya it's the cap on the Russian tradition of a Platza Massage (\$30, about 15 minutes). Although offered year-round, the Platza is particularly popular with hard-core detoxers as a New Year renewal treatment. Preparation for Platza begins sensibly enough with a warm tub soak and a bit of *schwitzing* (sweating) in Banya's Turkish steam room, one of two Russian saunas or the Finnish dry sauna. The *schwitz* continues in the 180-degree (yes, you read that right) Russian sauna as a masseur uses bundles of warm, soaked fresh birch leaves, or *veniks*, to gently lash the entire body. The *veniks* are then used as a compress against the skin, a process said to improve

circulation and deliver the leaves' essence into the pores. An immediate dip into the cold plunge pool — said to be a refreshing shock to the body and mind — completes the Platza.

"There's definitely a 'born again' quality to the Platza ritual," said Banya enthusiast Raquel Nayberg. "The whole Banya experience is sort of like happy hour in a bathing suit, very unique and very S.F."

KABUKI SPRINGS & SPA

Japantown institution Kabuki Springs & Spa offers a different brand of rest and relaxation. Even the walk from the communal Japanese baths to the treatment room can take on the serenity of tai chi movements. The spa



Frankie Frankeny

SIX MORE RELAXATION MECCAS

Nob Hill Spa inside the Huntington Hotel offers tired, windblown skin a fresh start with a dose of key vitamins. After basking in the facility's sumptuous accommodations, choose among nutrient-rich treatments such as Seaweed Leaf Body Ritual (\$215, 80 minutes), Vitamin Cocktail (\$140, 50 minutes) or Enrich Body Treatment (\$215, 80 minutes). 1075 California St., S.F.; (415) 345-2826. www.nobhillspa.com.



Spa Vitale

In addition to **Spa Vitale's** outdoor bathing rituals (\$60, 25 minutes), above, and treatments such as San Francisco Treat (\$105, 50 minutes) and Stress Buster Deluxe (\$150, 80 minutes), the spa offers La Dolce Vitale Wellness Experiences (\$475 per retreat; \$399 for Joy of Life Club members) through March 16. The wellness retreats — "A Fresh Start" and "It's Easy Being Green" — include massage, meditation and a focus on healthful eating. 8 Mission St., S.F.; (415) 278-3788. www.hotelvitale.com.

Sense Spa (at the Rosewood Hotel) For a more serene escape, this spa takes its cues from the Santa Cruz Mountains bordering the 16-acre property. Treatments nod to the region with names like Silicon Valley Celebrity Infusion (\$375, 105 minutes) and Gold Rush Renewal (\$195, 90 minutes), which features a scrub infused with 24-karat gold. 2825 Sand Hill Road, Menlo Park; (650) 561-1500. www.rosewoodhotels.com.

Spa Aiyana at Carmel Valley Ranch promises to put more movie into your step this winter with Fresh Start (\$420, three hours). The treatment includes Spa Aiyana's signature Herbal Vitality body treatment and Rejuvenate Hydrating Oxygen Infusion facial. Available through February. One Old Ranch Road, Carmel; (831) 625-9500. www.carmelvalleyranch.com.

Clear your sinuses and mind with **Calistoga Ranch's** Winter Ritual Experience (\$220, 75 minutes). After a foot exfoliation and ginger-root foot bath, enjoy a massage with essential-oil-infused warm compresses followed by a head, neck and shoulder treatment. 580 Lommel Road, Calistoga; (707) 254-2820. www.calistogaranh.com.

At the **Solage Spa in Calistoga**, start your rejuvenation with geothermal pools and the mud bar before moving onto the Ultimate Detox (\$320, 105 minutes). The treatment is bookended by a juice cleanse and features the spa's Back to Life detoxifying body wrap, full body massage and relaxing foot treatment. 755



David Wakely

SenSpa Wellness Center in the Presidio bills itself as a holistic urban retreat. The spa is well known for its mom-friendly services such as the Buddha Belly massage.



Mandarin Oriental

unwind in the Relaxation Tea Lounge. Many of the treatments use Quintessence oil.

offers a bouquet of pan-Asian body treatments. An Indonesian ritual for the senses, Javanese Lulur (from \$155, 80 minutes) incorporates jasmine frangipani scented oils into a massage, followed by a turmeric and rice skin scrub, a traditional yogurt application and a flower bath.

Seeking a mind-soothing Zen treatment? Abhyanga with Shirodhara (from \$180, 110 minutes) combines an herbal scalp treatment with a slow pouring of warm oil across the forehead. The ancient practice is said to relax the body and mind. For a detoxifying treatment, pick from several seaweed wraps (starting at \$90, 50 minutes), including antioxidant-laden Matcha Green tea, mineral-rich seaweed from the Brittany coast, or anti-

inflammatory Ginger Glow.

MANDARIN ORIENTAL

Ginger is also a key ingredient in Quintessence oil, Mandarin Oriental's signature warming oil used throughout many of the spa's rituals, which are continuously evolving. This month, Mandarin Oriental launched Calm Mind (from \$150, 45 minutes), a bespoke massage treatment that starts with a consultation to determine a guest's state of well-being, then adds customized oil blends accordingly. For a focus on beauty, the spa offers products from Spanish skin care company Natura Bissé. The Diamond Brilliant Facial (from \$350, 90 minutes) promises an even skin tone and smaller pores. Carboxi-Express (from \$100, 30 minutes) boasts age-fighting carboxitherapy, and the Cure (from \$210, 60 minutes) is an enzymatic skin purifier advertised as leaving skin clear and luminous, the ideal restoration for skin that has to reckon with downtown congestion.

SENSPA WELLNESS CENTER

Across town in the Presidio is SenSpa Wellness Center, a 13,000-square-

foot holistic urban retreat. This month, naturopathic practitioner Claire Graser joined the staff, allowing for on-site gynecological exams, botanical medicine, clinical nutritional counseling and pelvic floor therapy, which can be particularly useful for new moms. SenSpa is also known for its mom-friendly services such as the Buddha Belly massage (\$115, 50 minutes).

For those not with child, the Spicy Divine (\$185, 75 minutes) is a seasonal treat that takes its cues from local vintner Spicy Vines Spiced Wine. Available through March, the treatment harnesses the cell-renewing benefits of a walnut and orange peel scrub and the antioxidant properties of grape-seed powder extract, made from leftover wine grape seeds and skins. After the detoxifying scrub and body masque of grape-seed powder and kaolin clay, the skin is moisturized with aromatherapy oil topped off with a replenishing scalp treatment. The final key to this treatment? A Spicy Vines-inspired spritzer to wake the taste buds, of course.

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and relaxing foot treatment. 733 Silverado Trail, Calistoga; (855) 942-7442. www.solagecalistoga.com. — Valerie Demicheva

The 415

Earthbody Day Spa: 534 Laguna St., S.F.; (415) 552-7200. www.earthbody.net.

Archimedes Banya: 748 Innes Ave., S.F.; (415) 206-9000. www.banyasf.com. Part of the spa is clothing optional at various times; call for more information.

Kabuki Springs & Spa: 1750 Geary Blvd., S.F.; (415) 922-6000. www.kabukisprings.com. Alternating days for women and men in communal baths. Women: Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Men: Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Mixed: Tuesdays (bathing suit required).

Mandarin Oriental: 222 Sansome St., S.F.; (415) 276-9608. www.mandarinoriental.com/sanfrancisco/luxury-spa.

SenSpa Wellness Center: 1161 Gorgas Ave., S.F.; (415) 441-1777. www.senspa.com.