

Kid-friendly Spas

by Debbie Olsen

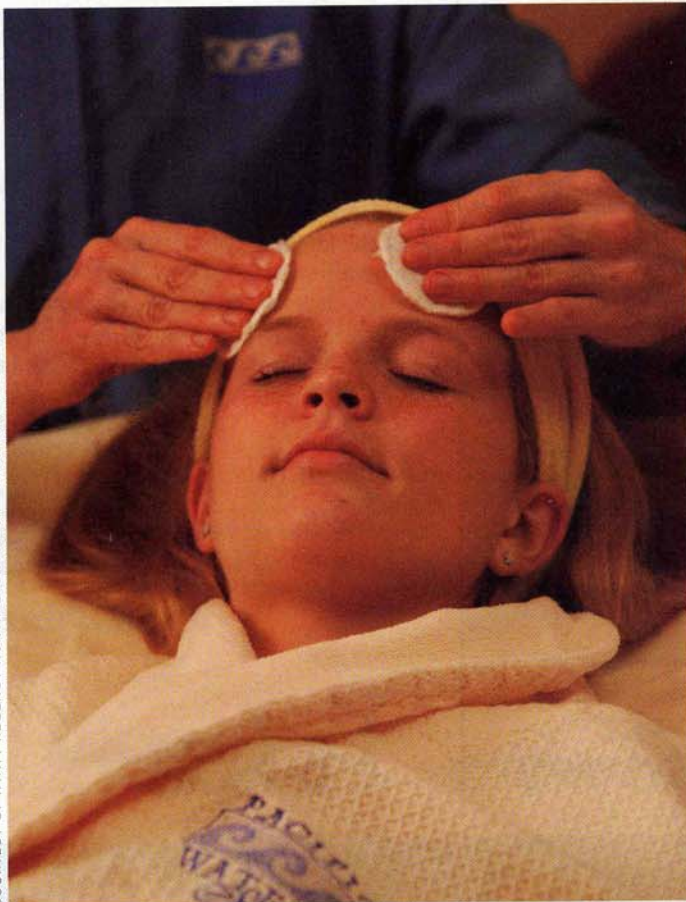
You're never too young to embark on a path of relaxation and wellness that soothes the body, mind, and spirit. Sometimes at the beginning of a long journey, it's nice to bring a friend — or even your mom. From the moment you set foot inside a destination spa, it feels as if you are entering a soothing sanctuary that engages all your senses. The spa is a special haven to relax and recharge, but the trouble is, it can be hard to resist the urge to linger longer on your very first visit.

"I hope it's not over yet," whispered my seven-year-old daughter Kelsey during a recent mother-daughter spa experience in California. I have to admit; I was thinking the same thing. There's nothing quite like a day at the spa to help you feel relaxed, rejuvenated and pampered. And while I was certain that pampering would not help improve my youngest child's case of "princess syndrome," I knew that a day at the spa would be a good chance for the two of us to enjoy some quality time together while sharing new and exciting experiences.

There was a time when offering childcare services was enough to escalate a spa-resort into the status of "family-friendly." Today, modern spas have to work a little harder to claim that designation.

"Parents are teaching children at a younger age the important benefits of taking care of their mind, body, and soul and building a healthy lifestyle," says Julie Mazza, spa director at the Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak's Tocasierra Spa and Salon. "This is evidenced by the fact that our Mommy and Me spa package has been one of our best-selling packages."

In response to an increased demand for children's spa services, these days there are many choices when it comes to a family spa vacation. On recent trips to Huntington Beach, Calif., and to Phoenix, our family experienced three terrific family-friendly spa resorts that had something to offer everyone. And with the great summer discount packages available at these and many other top-notch resorts, a family spa vacation is more affordable than you may realize.



COURTESY OF HYATT REGENCY HUNTINGTON BEACH - PACIFIC WATERS SPA

Hyatt Regency Huntington Beach Resort and Spa

Tucked away in a secluded garden, the 20,000-square-foot Pacific Waters Spa at the Hyatt Huntington Beach is the ultimate oasis of rejuvenation. With dual treatment rooms, mothers and daughters can reconnect while enjoying spa treatments together.

What makes this spa special is the fact that it offers a unique skin care line specially designed for children and teens, called Sophisti-kids. The kinds of products used on adult skin should be very different from what is used on younger skin, so while mom enjoys a deep moisturizing mask, her teenage daughter can enjoy a gentle cleansing facial.

Our Mommy and Me experience at Pacific Waters Spa included a mini facial and mini massage, along with chocolate kiss hand and foot treatments for Kelsey, and a full facial and massage for me in a dual treatment room.

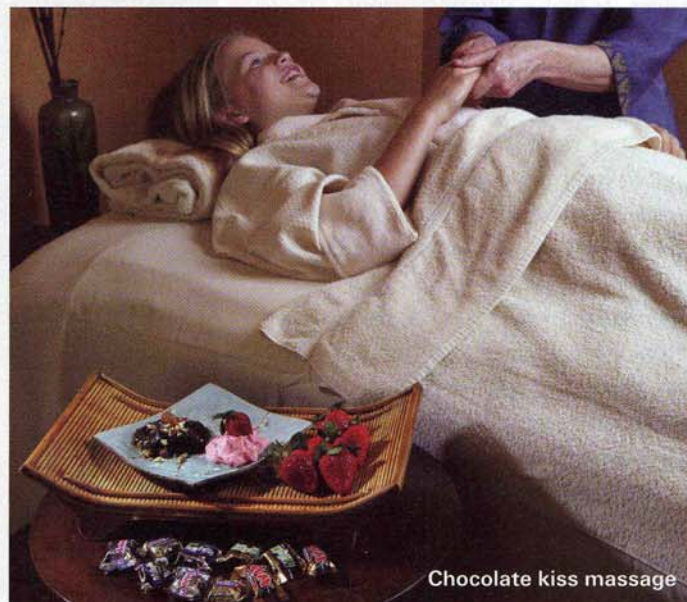
It is sometimes hard for a young child to lie still for very long without being asleep, but in this particular case, my young daughter had no trouble at all enduring a full 90-minute session at the spa. Our therapists left us both feeling revitalized and completely relaxed.

When you aren't enjoying the spa, this beachfront hotel has plenty of children's crafts and activities, a kids club, an arcade, a stunning swimming pool, an ice cream shop, weekend dive-in movies, and s'mores bonfires to enjoy. You can also arrange a family surfing lesson at the beach right outside your door.



Kelsey getting a facial.

PHOTO BY DEBBIE OLSEN



Chocolate kiss massage

COURTESY OF HYATT REGENCY HUNTINGTON BEACH



COURTESY OF POINTE HILTON SQUAW PEAK - PARTY PRINCESS



POINTE HILTON SQUAW PEAK

Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort

The Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort caters to families with plenty of amenities, activities, a kids concierge, a kids club, and a spa that welcomes children for most treatments. The relaxed atmosphere at the resort makes an ideal family escape and there is an excellent water park, complete with pools, mini-golf, water volleyball, a waterslide and a lazy river tube ride. Jane Owens, a licensed teacher and recent winner of a Hilton Spirit of Pride Award, is the director of children's services at the resort.

"We really make an effort to cater to families and many of our guests return again and again," says Owens. "It used to be that summer was the slow season, but it seems to get busier every year as more families take advantage of the good deals and the children's programs."

Many of the employees at the Coyote Camp kids club are also licensed teachers, making this resort truly exceptional when it comes to catering to the needs of families.

We spent many hours enjoying the poolside fun, but the highlight of the visit for my daughter and I was a visit to the Tocasiera Spa and Salon. The spa welcomes children and offers several packages specifically designed to meet their needs. Kelsey considered the Princess for a Day package that includes a pedicure, nail polish, an "up-do" hairstyle and take home tiara, but ultimately decided on a spa package that we could enjoy together. The Mommy and Me package included pedicures and manicures for both of us along with a framed photograph of us enjoying the spa together. The spa treatment was excellent, but the photo and the memories it evokes is something she will keep long afterwards.

Arizona Biltmore

The Arizona Biltmore is one of the oldest resorts in the valley and as the “Grande Dame” of Phoenix, this upscale resort is a haven for families as well as couples. Special summer activities include family pottery painting, poolside games, cooking demonstrations, s’mores roasts, and dive-in movies.

For children who like to be pampered, the Biltmore’s spa menu has recently been expanded to include special teen and children’s spa packages that include facials, pedicures, manicures, and hair-styling options. A poolside spa provides services to children and adults, weather permitting, while the main spa area remains an adults-only environment.

Other resort amenities include tennis, bicycles, mini-golf, life-size chess, a shaded and misted playground, eight pools (including a waterslide pool), an exercise room and two 18-hole golf courses.

We decided that our stay at the Biltmore was the perfect opportunity for Kelsey to experience her very first professional manicure and pedicure. Although she wasn’t sure what to think at first, by the time she was ready for polish, she was really starting to enjoy all the attention and pampering.

Kelsey flashed me a big toothy grin as her manicurist, René, carefully hand painted colorful flowers on her toenails. At the time, I was enjoying a moisturizing foot massage and was already smiling blissfully. While we had our nails polished, René gave us some great tips for do-it-yourself manicures (see below).

Our spa date together was a highlight for both of us and we realized that in an age of glossy look-alike hotels, the Biltmore still stands out from the rest. ■

Debbie Olsen is the mother of four children and a freelance writer and whose articles have appeared in magazines and newspapers. She is also a contributor to Fodors travel guides.



COURTESY OF THE ARIZONA BILTMORE



COURTESY OF THE ARIZONA BILTMORE



COURTESY OF THE ARIZONA BILTMORE

At Home Day Spa

"Taking care of yourself is a good habit to start while you're young," says René Baca of the Biltmore Salon in Phoenix. "For many young visitors, a spa visit is a special experience, but you can start good habits at home too."

Below are a few suggestions for inexpensive and fun stay-at-home manicures and pedicures that are ideal for birthday party celebrations or as a special evening together at home.



Manicure and Pedicure

- Soak for a few minutes in bath salts or bubble bath.
- Exfoliate the skin for several minutes using a light sugar or salt scrub created by mixing equal parts of sugar or salt with scented body oil.
- Massage the hands with a scented body lotion.
- Polish the nails.

Note: You can always add pure essential oils to any unscented oil or lotion to customize your scrubs and lotions.

Resources

There are a number of books that can help you plan a stay-at-home spa day including: *Simply Spa-tacular* by Erin Conley and Jennifer Worick or *Massage for Dummies* by Steve Capellini and Michael Van Welden. Check your local library or bookstore for more titles. For online tips about at-home spa treatments, visit www.beauty.about.com.

Tips for Choosing a Family-Friendly Spa

Not all spas welcome children. Make sure to inquire whether or not children are allowed in the spa and what services are available before making a reservation.

If you are receiving massage therapy, look for a spa that utilizes licensed massage therapists.

Inspect the cleanliness of the spa by observing how the manicurist cleans the bowls and tools following a treatment.

Check that the skincare products being used are appropriate for children.

Many spas will insist that you stay with your child if they are receiving a treatment in a private room. Even if they do not insist upon this, it is a good idea for parents to stay with their children.

Certain spa services, such as body wraps, are not recommended for children, because they can quickly dehydrate younger person. ■

