



## Relax and Say... Spääaahh!

**A**re you up for an apple blossom facial in the Annapolis Valley? How about a hot stone massage with stones smoothed by the tides of the Bay of Fundy? Or a waterfall massage under crystal clean east coast water? Canadian rosehip scrub? Seaweed wrap? How about a little something called the Stress-Less Express? I'm sure most of us could use one of those right about now – and perhaps we all should.

“We push very hard at work and push very hard in our personal lives,” says Rob Pejsa, president and chief operating officer of Moncton's Escape Spa (home of the chocolate truffle body wrap, among other things). “Eventually you reach a place where you're not able to bring your best game to the table. Take time for yourself, and you'll find yourself much more capable. We tell our clients and staff, ‘the world stays outside our doors.’ It'll still be out there later. But for those one or two hours, however long we have you, you give yourself permission to disconnect.”

Is it that hard to do? “Sometimes we don't realize what bad shape we're in,” says Willa Mavis, owner of Saint John's Inn on the Cove and Spa. “I can't believe what a difference a massage or a pedicure makes to my happiness.”

### Spa well

Even infrequent spa-goers know the health and aesthetic benefits of spa services. Massages reduce stress, release tension, treat aches, pains and stiffness. Facials, wraps and scrubs detoxify, clarify, tone, brighten and relax. Pedicures are beloved as a treat and a confidence booster – even in the winter, when pretty feet are stuffed into big boots or thick tights.

Ten years ago, when Mavis opened her spa, she had her work cut out for her. “A lot of people had only heard the word ‘spa’ on game shows like *The Price is Right*, where contestants could win a new spa,” she says. “So we opened and men would call up wanting to buy a spa for their wives.”

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How times change. Day spas and destination spas have popped up throughout the region, and they're as high-quality and luxurious as any in the country. Now Mavis (and all the other spa owners spoken to for this article) says men are the newest loyal spa goers. They may opt for services with names like ‘sports pedicure’ and ‘massage for the active manly man,’ but also manicures and facials.

“We keep our spa decor gender-neutral,” says Linda Brigley, owner of Spirit Urban Spa in downtown Halifax. With its big, comfy armchairs and warm wood furnishings, Spirit's ‘just for men’ services include a “First-time facial.”

Spirit has popular corporate programs as well. “Treat clients or staff to a spa day of relaxation,” she says. “It could be some time together with or without an agenda, or sometimes spa services are paired with a motivational speaker or a spa retreat.” Meetings, events, socials – the spa is becoming a popular and healthy alternative space for a conference or celebration.

### But where to begin?

**Here's the rub:** Massages are the most popular spa service, especially for business travellers. “It helps immunity, gets the kinks out of your neck, restores balance,” says Brigley. “And many executives have health plans that will cover it.” Next on the list are pedicures and facials, especially those favouring organic ingredients.

**You don't need the whole day:** All spas offer express services which can be scheduled for lunch or dinner breaks. The Spa at the Monastery in St. John's, Newfoundland touts its “Stress-Less Express” as the perfect antidote to a long day or a lengthy trip: body scrub, hydrotherapy and a massage – in and out and feeling fabulous in two hours. “From energy boosting to nourishing skin to pain management, there are so many benefits to just stopping and taking time out for the spa,” says manager Michelle Melee.

**But don't rush too much:** Whether you have an hour or a full day for your spa visit, allow for some chill time. At Spirit Spa, enjoy a steam shower or sit in the Tranquility Room (“a whisper zone where the only sound is the sipping of herbal tea,” according to Brigley). If you stop by the Inn on the Cove and Spa, accept Mavis' offer of tea and homemade cookies.

**You might as well book it. It's inevitable:** As Escape Spa's Pejsa says: “I think a spa is one of the last barriers. It can't be brought down by technology. You cannot download a massage.” **IABM**

*Speaking of healthy living, I'm looking for opinions on the best hotel fitness facilities in Atlantic Canada. Email thoughts on this, or any other executive leisure topic, to [stephanieporter@gmail.com](mailto:stephanieporter@gmail.com)*