The serenity at Pewaukee's Spargo Salon and Spa.

Rest & Relaxation

» Spas are bringing luxury to the Milwaukee area.

BY CHRISTINE GARDNER

Life can be a little crazy, trying to balance work and family. Even vacations can turn into hurried experiences that leave you more exhausted than before you left.

But many people are taking advantage of relaxation as a means to get away from the world, if only for a little while. Destination spas are a popular retreat, as are urban day spas that provide a respite from daily life.

According to the International SPA Association, the industry grew 24 percent between 2007 and 2008. The association also reports than one in four Americans has visited a spa.

From the purposefully designed facilities meant to whisk clients into a world of relaxation, to therapeutic services that quiet the mind and relax the body, luxury and pampering can provide the perfect getaway.

An Urban Oasis

Susan Haise owns Neroli Salon and Spa, which has locations in Milwaukee, Brookfield and Bayshore Town Center. She defines destination spas as facilities that provide accommodations along with other recreational opportunities, such as golf or hiking. And while Neroli may not fit the true definition of "destination spa," it certainly offers a chance to take a break, whether for a girls' weekend in the city or just an afternoon getaway. All three locations offer a wide array of services to help clients find their own private escape.

"At Neroli, there's quite a range of longer, more luxurious services that really provide you an opportunity to calm your thinking about all the other things you have to do," Haise says.

For instance, the Himalayan Body Treatment is a two-and-a-half-hour experience combining relaxation and rejuvenation. The body is steamed, exfoliated and massaged with special techniques and nutrients.

"It's a long, luxurious service just to focus on you," Haise says.

As an urban spa, Neroli has the benefit of providing the feel of a vacation without ever leaving the city. The mental retreat begins as soon as the guest enters the building. Clients are welcome to arrive early and enjoy therapeutic steam showers in advance of the treatments.

"It prepares your body, more successfully, to get the benefits of the service," Haise says.

And to get even more out of the experience, the Bayshore location offers complimentary yoga to anybody receiving an 80-minute treatment. The extra service of Iyengar yoga, meant to integrate the mind, body and emotions, can turn a single treatment into half a day at the spa.

"We try to offer superior quality with a reasonable price," Haise says.

Neroli also works with clients to provide assistance for those coming to Milwaukee from out of town. Haise says Neroli caters to events such as bachelorette parties, baby showers or just simple get-togethers.

"Today, people really covet spending time together," Haise says, "rather than just buying a gift."

Escaping the Maze

Life can often feel like a complicated maze that's impossible to escape. But getting out of the city can sometimes provide a necessary break from the daily rigors. And in Green Lake, there's a spa specifically designed to shepherd guests toward tranquility and inner peace.

The labyrinth at Evensong Spa is the facility's focal point. The goal is to help guests find wholeness by looking inward during their meditation on the labyrinth's path. Tammy Gillespie, assistant spa director, says the labyrinth is essentially the opposite of a maze.

"There are no dead-ends. No wrong way to walk it," Gillespie says. "You can just follow the path."

Evensong Spa opened three years ago to make the Heidel House Resort – always popular during the summer – appealing as a year-round destination.

Gillespie says vacationers come to Evensong to experience the luxury and tranquility of the spa while still enjoying other activities, such as golf, cross-country skiing and hiking.

"It gives the guest time to truly rejuvenate," she says.

People interested in coming to Heidel House for the spa are encouraged to take advantage of the resort's package deals. A popular package for a girls' getaway is the "Get Away and Get Together Package," which offers one night at the resort, lunch and a $100 spa credit so guests can get the services they prefer.

"Our theory is, whether you've been to 100 spas or none, this should be your best spa experience," Gillespie says. "We

do anything we can do to make your stay better."

The spa's most popular service, the Inner Journey Massage, begins with heated stones placed on key energy points of the body. That's followed by a relaxing full-body massage. Guests sometimes combine this with a full-service pedicure, complete with a glass of wine or a smoothie.

"Our staff is trained so that our guest is not rushed through service," Gillespie says. "We always try and stress to our clients to take the time to enjoy the spa experience."

Luxury Service Close to Home

Doug Saloga has vacationed at world-class resorts around the globe. Traveling has had its rewards, both for Saloga and for the spa scene in Wisconsin.

Saloga has taken his experiences and applied them to his own creation – Spargo Salon and Spa in Pewaukee. He believes his 7,860-square-foot Roman-inspired facility provides all the luxury and relaxation of a destination spa, but it's less than an hour away from Milwaukee.

Impressed with the impeccable service at top luxury spas, Saloga wanted to bring that quality to Spargo. Vacationers at such premier resorts are treated like royalty, and Saloga wanted nothing less for his clientele. Having a professional, experienced, happy staff goes a long way toward making the spa experience a memorable one.

"We really do feel that our services are an experience for a client, not just a service," says Janice Clark, general manager of Spargo. "Our employees have designed their services. They also take ownership of that service. That's something you can't buy. That's something you can't train. That's something from within themselves."

Saloga also knew that a great spa should take its guests out of their normal lives. "You want to be transported away," he says.

He uses water and architecture to create a facility in the tradition of a Roman bathhouse. All of the features are custom-built. Everything is unique, including original artwork throughout the facility. Guests are pampered and taken into another world.

"When I was in Pompeii, I walked through the ancient spas. This is the elegance I wanted in a spa when I built it," he says. "The guests truly get transported away from an urban environment."

Many customers have spoken directly to Saloga to compliment him on his accomplishment. One client had lived in Italy and remarked on the authenticity of Spargo, saying she felt like she was back there again.

Getting a Break Without Breaking the Bank

Penny Rushing, owner of VICÍ, knows everybody could use a break. When she built the VICÍ Capilli Salon and Spa at VICÍ Park, it was important for the spa to have its own character and not seem like an afterthought to the salon.

"We built it with a spa in mind," Rushing says of the Milwaukee facility. "It's a calming, relaxing environment. It's quiet and subdued."

Rushing, whose VICÍ brand also includes a salon in Brookfield and beauty schools in Milwaukee and Brookfield, was not as familiar with the spa end of the business. Prior to opening the Milwaukee facility, Rushing visited spas around the country and brought back all the elements she loved, from heated floors to warm colors. Individual rooms add a sense of privacy, but girlfriends getting together for a day at the spa can use a couple's room to enjoy the experience together, Rushing says.

"It is such a wonderful experience," she says. "For people who haven't tried it, it's wonderful."

And that's what Rushing wants – for people to have access to pampering services right in their own backyard. It was her intent to make facials, massage and body treatments accessible to a typical Milwaukee resident by making those services exceptional and affordable.

Something as simple as a facial can take clients on a journey of relaxation. Everything is customized, right down to the aroma infused in all the products used at VICÍ.

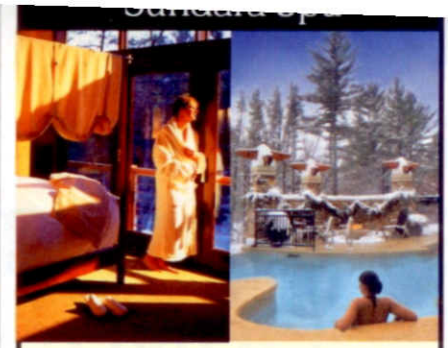
VICÍ's beauty school offers equally affordable rates. Younger clients can get professional services with top products and have fun doing it.

"We leave the curtains open," Rushing says. "They giggle and have a great time."

And Rushing tries to instill a sense of top-notch service in her students.

"We give them a lot of experience in our spa so we can give them lessons on what good service is," Rushing says. "A service is a service. The only thing that makes you different is your level of service." ■

Christine Gardner is a freelance writer based in Normal, Ill.



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