

# Desert Daliances

Play time and pampering in Phoenix

**H** EADING INTO THE HOLIDAY SEASON, many of us face shorter days and increased stress. But a day of pampering in Phoenix, the hub of Valley of the Sun, can melt away those cares — and maybe a couple of pounds.

No longer simply havens of hot oil massages and steamy sauna sessions, most resort spas these days focus on overall well-being and fitness. For example, the Spa at Camelback Inn, located on the border of Phoenix and Scottsdale, offers exercise classes in addition to more traditional spa treatments. With just a little planning, spa-goers can get a complete fitness experience.

“For business travelers, there’s usually some time in the schedule when you aren’t booked solid,” says Kelli Ziegler, director of the Spa at Camelback Inn. “It might be the one opportunity to book time for yourself.”

To get the most out of the time you do have, Ziegler recommends starting early with fitness classes. Choose a relaxation class, like meditation, yoga, or stretching, and one for strength or body sculpting. Frequent flyers may also benefit from the 60-minute Traveler’s Workout (\$80), which shows you a strength and flexibility routine you can do almost anywhere.

Schedule a relaxing appointment, like a soak in the recently renovated whirlpool and a Swedish massage, late

in the day. “Massages are all about releasing the stress,” Ziegler says.

Massages at the Spa at Camelback Inn start at \$100, and fitness appointments start at \$65; entry to the spa and selected fitness classes is free with a one-hour spa treatment or fitness ses-



sion. Hotel guests may enjoy the spa for \$25, no other booking necessary. Call 800.922.2635 for specifics.

For a more wintry form of relaxation, North Scottsdale’s Alltel Ice Den, located just off Highway 101 and East Bell Road, may fill the bill. Young skaters train for international competitions on its 120,000-square-foot rink, which also

hosts traveling NHL teams and is home to one of the largest Learn to Skate figure skating programs in the country.

Glide in for an Ice Café lesson, which costs \$13.50 and includes a 30-minute adult group lesson, two hours of ice time, skate rental, and coffee. Open public skating is also available for \$7 a session, plus \$3 if you need to rent skates.

If you’re a novice, ice skating won’t give you much of a workout, but you’ll gain flexibility and balance while strengthening core muscles, says Julie Patterson, director of programming and skating at the Ice Den. “Even as a recreational skater, you’ll burn calories,” she explains. “It’s as good as a brisk walk, at least.” For public skating or lesson times, call 480.473.5811.

If you’d rather let someone else’s legs do the walking, head to South Mountain Park/ Preserve, on the edge of the Sonoran Desert, where you can saddle up for a guided trail ride. South Mountain is the largest municipal park in the United States, with 58 miles of trails and more than 16,000 acres.

“There’s no better way to see the desert than to do it by horseback,” says Kathy Lloyd, manager of Ponderosa Stables, located in the preserve. The desert animals are used to seeing horses and humans, and don’t always run away so bring a camera.

## Tipping Point


After 60 minutes of body kneading, you'll wonder what you did to deserve the massage-induced bliss. Of course, a verbal "thanks" to the massage therapist is always helpful, but a 10 to 20 percent tip is the best way to show your appreciation. In most spas, you can add the tip to the final bill, or discreetly put cash in a spa-provided envelope with the therapist's name. — D.A.K.



You'll enjoy the meditative benefits of the horse's rhythmic, swaggering walk. The animal gets the cardio workout, but you'll get some exercise from using your thighs, calves, knees, heels, and feet to hold on. Two days after a ride, your inner thighs and rear will be sore, Lloyd says. "You rediscover muscles you forgot you had."

Lloyd recommends a one-hour ride, which costs \$25. A two-hour ride, which runs \$40-45, is available if you're in better shape. Ponderosa also offers cookout and sunset dinner rides.

While on the trail, look for native desert animals like javelinas, which resemble pigs. Jackrabbits, roadrunners, coyotes, raptors, and owls may cross your path as well. But watch out for the saguaro cacti, indigenous to Arizona, along with prickly pear, barrel, and cholla cacti. You'll want to wear long pants and close-toed shoes if you come out here.

Ponderosa's winter rides are first come, first served from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m., and require reservations after that. Call 602.268.1261. 

*Writer Deborah Abrams Kaplan lives in California and hopes her husband will treat her to a spa day this holiday season.*

**Getting There:** Continental offers nonstop service to Phoenix from its hubs in Houston, New York/Newark, and Cleveland.