



Spas come of age in the Catskills

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The Emerson Resort & Spa, which opened in March on Route 28 in Mount Tremper, is helping put the Catskills on the map as a chic destination. It also is indicative of a broader trend: the necessity for any resort worth its salt to include a spa.

Indeed, spa vacations have become this decade's escape of choice. Not just the Hudson Valley, but the whole state is trying to cash in on the phenomenon. Four years ago a spa alliance, NYSPA, was launched with help from former Lt. Gov. Mary Anne Krupak and the current NYSPA chairperson. Hoping to resurrect an industry that had its heyday 150 years ago, when hoop-skirted women and gents in waistcoats took the waters at Saratoga Springs and other resorts that capitalized on the state's abundant mineral springs, NYSPA aims to promote the spas in conjunction with state tourism efforts.

Last week, NYSPA held its third symposium at Mohonk Mountain House, the landmark Victorian-era grand hotel in New Paltz that opened its own 30,000-square-foot spa complex two years ago. The theme was "Spa Entrepreneurs: Growing the New York Economy." To see the concept in action, you need look no further than the examples of the Emerson and Mohonk spas, both of which are impressive facilities with a comprehensive menu of treatments and amenities devised to appeal to the thousands of affluent workaholics in metropolitan New York City who want to chill for the weekend.

Both are betting on an industry that brings in almost \$10 billion in revenues annually in North America, according to the International SPA Association. Mary Tabacchi, a professor at the Cornell

Hotel School who is on the NYSPA board, said the spa trend exploded starting in 2003 and is fueled by the baby boomers' desire to stay young, healthy and fit. The emphasis on meditation and harmonious lifestyle also fits with the boomers' quest for spiritual enlightenment, she said, and "they have the dollars to spend."

At the Emerson, the Indian-themed décor, consisting of richly colored canopies and teak doors—the elaborately carved set in the lobby is from a 17th-century Indian palace—creates a mood of subdued luxury. A stay in one of the 25 adult-only suites is heaven for space-challenged Manhattanites; each room has soaring cathedral ceilings with large windows and a deck looking out on the Esopus Creek, a gas fireplace, a flat-screen TV with DVD player, a spacious bathroom with jetted tub and Swiss shower (the water comes at you from above and from the side), and a minibar and wine rack stocked with 18 bottles of wine. Room service is available and wireless Internet access throughout the complex enables guests to access their e-mail. The rates, including meals and one treatment, range from \$497 to \$795 per person per night.

Orchids and statues of Hindu deities grace the ambling public spaces, which include the restaurant, large lounge and balcony with a reading area, billiards room, and the spa, of course, with dim lighting and a bluestone fountain to induce calm. The fully outfitted complex includes 12 treatment rooms, two of which are designed for couples, two yoga studios, a large fitness center, hair salon, cafe and outdoor deck with two cabanas for treatments.

Paul Rakov, the Emerson's director of public relations, said an ancient Indian treatment, called Ay-

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urvedic, which involves pouring warm oil on to the third "eye," was one of the spa's signatures. Among the body products showcased in the boutique — an important ancillary feature of these businesses — were such novelties as a selection of "sprayologies" (you spray them under the tongue to relieve a hangover or boost your immune system) and an elixir called "liquid yoga."

The Emerson also has a conference room and caters to groups (additional accommodations are available in the nearby lodge).

The spa at Mohonk, whose sprawling complex of castle-like buildings on a lake traces its origins back to 1869, has the same combination of treatment and hydrology rooms, café, fitness center, and hair salon, along with a large indoor pool. Eco-spa fanciers will like the building's many "green" details.

Nina Smiley, director of marketing, said that the spa complements the resort's outdoor activities, which center around the lake, miles of trails in the surrounding preserve, horseback riding, rock climbing, tennis, golf and in winter, ice skating. The rates at the 266-room resort include all meals and range from \$445 to \$1,500 a night per room, with spa treatments costing extra.

Both spas cater to locals as well and offer day programs. Tabacchi said most spas need to sell to a day clientele, perhaps at lower rates, to attract more customers in the down period during the week. The pressure is on to squeeze out revenue in any way possible, because building spas is expensive; Tabacchi calculates the cost at \$350 to \$450 per square foot. It doesn't help that a lot of the space doesn't bring in any revenue.

"You need to charge more for treatments to cover the people lazing around, or charge for local memberships," she said. "If you're not getting enough from new guests, memberships can save your hide."

The Emerson and Mohonk are the new kids in town; several low-key spa resorts in the area have been catering to customers for decades.

Just up the road from the Emerson is The Copperhead Inn and Spa, which is also right on the Esopus. Owned and operated by Elizabeth



The beds are comfortably outfitted at the Emerson.

Winiograd, a native of Poland, the spa attracts many Europeans. Fencing is offered along with yoga. There is a 60-foot pool, fairly snug but comfortably outfitted rooms and suites, and light-but-elegant meals served in the dining room. There is a full menu of facials, mud wraps, massage and hydrotherapy, including the invigorating "Scotch Horse," in which the person is pummeled with hot and cold water.

This season the Copperhead is introducing a weekend program presided over by an ordained Zen priest in which a gentle version of Zen practice is interspersed with massage, yoga, nature walking, journal writing and art making.

The New Age Health Spa is a serene retreat located on 280 pristine acres in Sullivan County. The spa has a loyal clientele, and its "juice fast miniweek" is particularly popular. There are 36 accommodations and many choices of facials, wraps and massages; colonic hydrotherapy, which cleanses the colon, is a specialty. A steam room, sauna, outdoor pool and dining room complete the facilities. "People like our laid-back, nonpretentious resort," said marketing director Laura DeGuzac. "You don't have to dress up. A lot of guests go to Canyon Ranch or Golden Door but they come back here because it's like a family."

Hudson Valley guide released

Folks eager to reconnoiter Rip Van Winkle's haunts — and plenty more — have a new guide to speed them on their way.

The Hudson Valley & Catskill Mountains: An Explorer's Guide by Joanne Michaels is out in its sixth edition and not a moment too soon to explore the area this summer. The book has already garnered "recommended" status from by The New York Times and includes the best of Saratoga Springs and Albany.

Michaels portrays a region that is a burgeoning destination for travelers seeking everything from outdoor adventure and family fun to five-star dining featuring locally grown

produce.

The book is published by Countryman Press. It offers tips on luxurious resorts, cozy bed and breakfasts, galleries and antique shops (Hudson in Columbia County is approaching 100 of them), wineries, farm stands, hiking and bike trails, and places to kayak and canoe. The book contains detailed maps and hundreds of honest reviews of accommodations and eateries.

Michaels claims to have cast "a wide net" in search of adventure. She has authored or co-authored several books on the region and is the host/producer of the regionally syndicated TV show, "The Joanne Michaels Show."