

Oh la la, Cal-a-Vie Spa Brings Pampering and Provence to Southern California

By Dena Roche



When it comes to five star destination spas it's hard to really rank them: they all offer gorgeous accommodations, great treatments, fitness and healthy food. What it really comes down to is a certain je ne sais quoi that is highly personal.

Arriving at Cal-a-Vie, a destination spa nestled 40 minutes north of San Diego, I feel like I'm pulling up to a friend's massive French Country estate (If my friends owned 200 acre properties in Provence!) The architecture and manicured grounds are stunning, and the

result is an instant feeling of relaxation.

There is no real check-in process other than being led to my spa villa room featuring 18th and 19th century French furniture mixed with modern touches like Italian linens and Turkish towels. I meet with a scheduler to talk about my goals for the trip, my fitness interests and my spa treatments, so she can craft perfect schedules for me during my three day stay. Trips to Cal-a-Vie are three day, four day or week getaways.

The week I'm at Cal-a-Vie is an all

female week and the other 21 women I meet are fascinating, ranging in age from mid 20s to 60 plus. The camaraderie that developed within our group was one of my favorite aspects of the spa. The group interplay was stronger than it was at other destination spas I've visited and especially nice for the extroverted solo traveler. The energy at Cal-a-Vie is mellow, and the impression I'm left with is that this is the spa to visit when you're looking for all out luxury, pampering, fitness and a lot of relaxation. The vibe is laid-back European to match

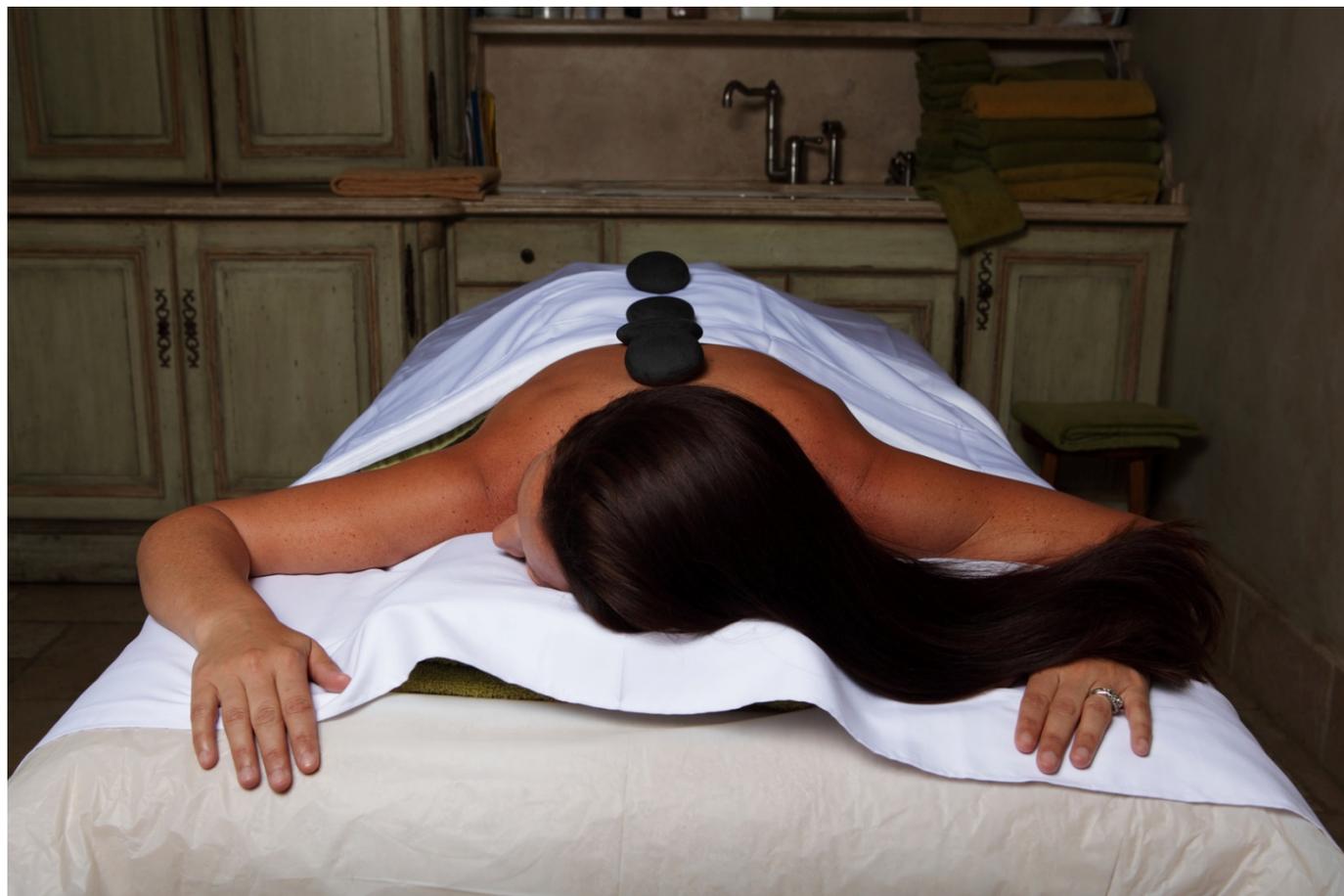
This is the spa to visit when you're looking for all out luxury.

Cal-a-Vie offers a decent amount of fitness options throughout the day.

the décor. The staff to guest ratio is 5:1 and it's reflected in the service. The special requests I heard were accommodated with a smile.

But don't let me lead you to believe it's all primping and pampering. Cal-a-Vie offers a decent amount of fitness options throughout the day. The morning is about getting your heart pumping with classes like belly dancing, Barre camp, TRX, and Piloxing. While the afternoon is time to integrate body and mind with offerings like chakra yoga, stretch, tai-chi or meditation. Some of these classes are held in the cozy hillside chapel that was shipped stone by stone from Dijon, France and painstakingly reassembled at Cal-a-Vie. Because of the small number of guests, I end up having many private fitness classes during my stay. Each day begins with an optional 6:30 am hike on the mountains surrounding Cal-a-Vie.

The La Petite Plan (three-day stay) I am on includes six spa treatments; two massages, facial, reflexology, hydrotherapy and a scalp and hair service. Guests can upgrade the basic services to treatments like Thai massage, craniosacral therapy or even acupuncture. The masseuses were especially good and willing to tailor the massage to my specific needs.



Photography courtesy of Cal-a-Vie.

They (Cal-a-Vie) do daily laundry for their guests so you can really pack next to nothing.

Quality nutrition is a hallmark of any destination spa and Cal-a-Vie is no exception. Guests are given the option of a 1500 or 1200 calories per day plan. I opt for the 1500 and for me the portions felt bigger than what I eat at home, although this wasn't the case for everyone. Comments from the group included jokes about licking the plate to get it all and confessions of eating a stash of power bars in two days. The food philosophy at Cal-a-Vie is eating clean so there is a focus on organic produce and proteins, low gluten and seasonal and regional offerings. The result is nutritionally balanced meals that taste delicious. Any and all diets can be accommodated. Meals are taken as a group at the same time each day and provided the ideal platform to get to know the other women. No alcohol is served at Cal-a-Vie, though they will gladly order it from the adjacent country club for you to enjoy in your room. Many of the guests (yours truly included) packed their beverage of choice alongside the fitness gear in their luggage.

One thing that sets Cal-a-Vie apart from other spas I've covered is that they do daily laundry for their guests so you can really pack next to nothing. They also provide tee shirts, sweats and shorts, but a word to the fashionistas, they are basic 1980s grey sweats and not the stylish Lululemon you might be accustomed to.

Another unique aspect of Cal-a-Vie is that it has to be the only spa with a serious antique store on site. John and Terri Havens, the owners of Cal-a-Vie, are Francophiles with a love for French antiques. So many guests asked about buying the furniture and accessories in the spa that Cal-a-Vie recognized another business opportunity and in late 2013 opened the store which specializes in 18th and 19th century French antiques.

The end of a perfect day at Cal-a-Vie
One thing I love about destination spas is that the setting and energy allow me to turn my monkey mind off and simply relax. I find tranquility at Cal-a-Vie on the hiking trails, sitting alone paging through a magazine by the fire in the Garden Room, and journaling in my room that lacks a TV for mindless entertainment. The kind of quiet found at Cal-a-Vie is hard to find in the "real" world and is an ideal catalyst for inspiration.

To experience Cal-a-Vie for yourself visit [Cal-a-Vie](#).

