

Spa Resorts and Destinations

by Julianne Mooney



Enjoy the moment. It's the journey, not the destination. Don't sweat the small stuff. I love these sayings, but let's be honest, it's not always easy to put these wise words into practice. Sometimes, I can't find a minute in the day to sit still, let alone take time to savour the moment. Or to not worry about the endless list of things to do, friends I've neglected calling for days, weeks, months and bills that need paying. However, I'm a firm believer that holidays are a great way to retreat from every day life, reset all the buttons and return with enthusiasm, fresh dreams and resolutions.

In the past, my holidays went something like this. Choose a far off continent, pinpoint random country of interest, pull together a frenzied itinerary, where I travel every other day so I can see as much of the country as possible. Well, if you're going to travel thousands of miles, you may as well pack in as much as possible, right? While you may return a little jaded and euphoric at the thought of being able to unpack your bag and sleep in the same bed for longer than three nights, you do feel fresher in your thoughts and views and often inspired. This is a wonderful way to travel and even better when you've got 4 months of a holiday and you can throw your itinerary to the wind and head off in another direction. This is how adventure finds you.

However, after years of these types of holidays and galavants around the globe, I have reached a point where I don't want every holiday to be like this. I may be shot for saying this, but sometimes I think to hell with the journey, give me the destination. Take me to a place where I can unpack my bags and have to do and think of nothing for the duration of my stay. And the perfect place to do this? A spa, of course. Pull on a white robe, potter to the relaxation room, indulge in all the fresh fruit and herbal teas you can stomach and hand your body over to the experts to massage, exfoliate and rejuvenate.

I once spent two days not removing my robe, except to step into the sauna and steam room. I felt like a movie star eating my breakfast on the terrace in my white fluffy robe and left feeling like a new person. I was with a friend and we promised to treat ourselves to a spa break every year for our birthdays. We've not upheld our promise. I think I need to rectify this and with my birthday only a month away, I guess there's time to reclaim our promise.

Whether you're looking for a weekend retreat nearby, an exotic body and mind spa or something a little bit different, you can find it out there. Today, Wednesday, 16th May at 8.45am on Ireland AM, TV3, I gave some ideas for spa breaks around the world. Below is the information from the slot.

KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

Thailand has many medium to high-end spa resorts littered around the islands that dot its southern coastline. Outdoor massages, detoxifying menus and luxury accommodation lure couples for a quiet, romantic break or small clusters of female friends in search of a healthy escape.

[Koh Samui](#), although a busy island, has a number of excellent secluded spa resorts varying in price. At the high end is The Banyan Tree Samui, set on a pristine, white beach on the south-east of the island with accommodation in luxury villas, each with their own pool. The spa uses a holistic approach and treatment rooms overlook the tranquil, green Lamai Bay. The [Conrad Koh Samui](#) is another high-end resort with private villas and a luxury spa, as is the [Sala Samui Resort and Spa](#).

However, if you're looking for a unique experience, a spa that treats both body and mind, then [Kamalaya Resort](#) is one of the best destination spas you will find, having recently won Destination Spa Award Asia & Australasia at the World Spa Awards. A Wellness Sanctuary and Holistic Spa, Kamalaya overlooks a breathtakingly beautiful lagoon and is surrounded by lush, tropical vegetation. The resort prides itself at looking at each guest as a whole, creating a spa experience tailored to each individual, with treatments a combination of both eastern and western traditions. Days float by blissfully aided by healthy, but delicious food, a choice of yoga, pilates, Thai chi and other gentle daily fitness classes and customized treatments. The resort has won a number of awards including for its superb cuisine and you can feast on fresh fish dishes or at the start of your visit develop a special diet for your stay to help in detox or weight loss. All of this and peaceful, beautiful natural surrounds will have you feeling brand, spanking new at the end of your stay.

Getting There Fly to Bangkok from €650 return with www.ba.com and www.lufthansa.com and www.emirates.com

Special Offers

[Well Being Escapes](#) - Kamalaya From €3500 per person includes flights, transfers, all meals and beverages, a range of treatments, 7 nights accommodation – first time visitors get one free night.

[Trailfinders](#) – From €2,969 for a stay at the 5 star Banyan Tree Samui, Includes flights from Dublin to Koh Samui with Etihad Airways, all taxes and charges, return transfers, daily breakfast, accommodation in a Deluxe Pool Villa Suite with private plunge pool for 9 nights, two 90 minute spa massages for 2 people per stay and one free dinner. Valid for 1 September to 14 October.

VITERBO, LAZIO, ITALY

Only 100kms north of Rome, surrounding the city of Viterbo, once a popular retreat for the Popes, exists a natural thermal spa. The volcanic nature of the land has led to the emergence

of natural thermal springs, where the Romans used to come to enjoy the sulfur, healing waters. The springs arise in the open countryside and locals, as well as curious tourists make their way to the natural springs said to ease muscle pain and soften the skin. Whether their healing powers exist or not, it makes for a rather different spa experience. Slip into the hot pools, that often spill out into artificial basins carved into white clay, lie back and let the waters work their magic. Bulicame is the best known having been surrounded by a complex, built by the Romans, and has four pools varying in size, or Il Bagnaccio is another popular choice with locals, however there are plenty to seek out and the tell-tale sign is usually the steam and somewhat pungent smell arising from an open field.

It's certainly a cheaper spa experience than checking in to a luxury spa resort, but if you feel the need for a bit of luxury, a number of spas have arisen in the area taking advantage of the fact that the natural thermal spa attracts those in search of a bit of relaxation.

An hour and half north of Viterbo are the [Bagno Vignoni](#) thermal springs, that were once famed by the Etruscans and later aristocratic Romans, with the likes of Lorenzo the Magnificent and Pope Pius II gracing their waters. Located on the path of the ancient pilgrimage – Via Francigena, the medieval pilgrim's used to bathe in the waters. Adjacent to the thermal baths is the marvelous five-star [Adler Thermae Spa Resort](#), which has its own thermal spring and fully equipped spa providing some luxury, albeit at a higher price than the natural spa itself. Tuscany has a number of wonderful springs including Bagni di San Filippo and Petriolo.

Caminoways.com have recently released a package where you spend three days in Viterbo in a spa hotel, followed by a 5 day self-guided walk to Rome along the final section of the Via Francigena. This is an alternative combination of a relaxation and fitness holiday, while others may opt to simply enjoy the natural pools, visit day spas and then spend a few days in the romantic capital.

Getting There Fly direct to Rome from €40 each way www.aerlingus.com and www.alitalia.com and www.ryanair.com

Accommodation From €50 per person per night

Special Offers

[Caminoways.com](#) – €990 per person for a combination spa and walking holiday. Price includes luggage transfer from hotel to hotel, en-suite rooms on a half board basis, 7 nights accommodation, return transfers from Viterbo to Vetralla.

[Adler Spa Resort](#) – €800 per person for 4 nights, half-board, three treatments and a wine tasting session

NORTHERN IRELAND

If you don't have the time or money to go abroad there are some excellent spa breaks closer to home. Northern Ireland has a number of good spas, including the well-known [Slieve Donard Hotel and Spa](#) in the seaside town, Newcastle in Co. Down. The hotel is located at the foot of the stunning Mourne Mountains and makes a good weekend escape if you fancy a remote hike through the mountains, finishing off the day in the spa looking out across the sea or enjoying a rejuvenating massage.

Galgorm Manor, only a 30 minute drive from Belfast has an impressive spa, which has recently added what they call The Boudoir, a private area for groups of up to 20 people with it's only relaxation room, treatment rooms, outdoor jacuzzi etc. They also have treatment

rooms for couples, a large treatment menu and a relaxation zone where you can while the hours away.

Special Offers

[Slieve Donard Hotel](#) – €145 includes Summer Sparkle Spa Experience are below and includes Luxury Manicure or Pedicure / ESPA Full Body Massage or Skin Brightening Facial / full use of the facilities / light lunch. Accommodation and Breakfast from €65 per person per night.

[Galgorm Manor](#) From €120 includes B&B, 4 course dinner, a choice of a 25 minute treatment: Seaweed Foot Cocoon, Face & Head Massage, Hot Stone Back Massage, Organic Lavender & Seaweed Sugar Glow, thermal spa access

Check out [Queen of Retreats](#), an online resource of antidotes to our world written by an experienced health and travel journalist who walks her talk.