

Hotel Insider: Your SXSW Oasis— Lake Austin Spa Resort

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March is a wildly exciting time to be in Austin, Texas. But sometimes even the most fervent SXSW devotee wants to escape the madness. We have just the place for you to check in, unplug, and get away in the midst of one of the country's hottest festivals.



The LakeHouse Spa at Lake Austin Spa Resort. (Photo: Lake Austin Spa Resort)

Hotel: Lake Austin Spa Resort

Location: 1705 S. Quinlan Park Road, Austin, Texas 78732

Background: Welcome to a state of relaxation. Lake Austin Spa Resort is a 19-acre destination spa set on the shores of beautiful Lake Austin, across from the Balcones Canyonlands Nature Preserve, and a must stop on your next trip to Austin. Luscious gardens, gorgeous interiors, more than 100 spa treatments, up to 20 daily fitness classes, and stellar cuisine

make this one of the top five spas in the world picked by *Condé Nast Traveler* and *Travel + Leisure* magazines.



The onsite organic gardens are one of the property's best assets. They especially shine in the spring and fall. (Photo: Lake Austin Spa Resort)

When to go: Tended to by the resort's director of flora and fauna, the onsite organic gardens are spectacular in the spring and fall. More than a thousand species of plants, herbs, vegetables, spices, and wildflowers fill the lakeshore gardens, and provide meals for the guests as well as ingredients for spa treatments in the property's 25,000-square-foot LakeHouse Spa. It's not uncommon to find the executive chef, Stéphane Beaucamp, foraging daily in the gardens for meals. Summers feature a water-themed program called Quench!, which packs more than 20 lake activities into several days. Keep an eye out for the monthly Culinary Experience, as food here is definitely a high point.



Put on a spa robe and relax in one of the lakefront hammocks. (Photo: Lake Austin Spa Resort)

The vibe: A constant state of bliss is achieved through a combination of healthy meals, workouts and spa treatments. Try the Texas Starry Night massage as your nightcap. The interior design was conceived and overseen by co-owner Mike McAdams, with sophisticated touches that feel more like the south of France than central Texas. The smells, the colors, and the staff all contribute to the spa's warmth and understated elegance. Three swimming pools offer something for everyone (don't miss the Pool Barn!), and we saw plenty of girlfriend gatherings, mothers and daughters claiming some much-needed bonding time while couples enjoyed their spa time together.

Getting there: The resort is located just 32 miles from Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, and a private car service will bring you there for the same price as a taxi (the resort's front desk will help you arrange a ride). Uber, Super Shuttle, and car rentals are also available.

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Luxury Lakeview rooms are among the cozy options available. (Photo: Lake Austin Spa Resort)

The rooms: Forty guest rooms are perched up on a hill, some featuring jaw- dropping views of Lake Austin and the gardens. These are not typical hotel rooms. Sourced, one-of-a-kind fabrics, delectable bedding, and a soothing color palate that mimics nature all contribute to the experience, which aims to recreate the feeling of staying in a French chateau. Twenty-four Luxury Lakeview and Luxury Garden rooms were recently renovated in 2014, with hand-selected decor that creates a soothing ambiance, much like the calming waters of Lake Austin just beyond the window. The Lady Bird Suite and a few other accommodations have private hot tubs in their own gardens, and for a group of friends or family who want to gather after a fun day of activities, covered porches with Brown Jordan furniture are ideal for winding down in comfort with a glass of wine.



The resort offers several great aquatic activities including stand-up paddle boarding. (Photo: Lake Austin Spa Resort)

What I loved: The lake. There is something magical about watching water slowly move past you, as if all your troubles are being washed away. (The “lake” is actually the Texas Colorado River, and stays at a constant level and constant 72 degrees all year round). We took out Hydrobikes and stand-up paddle boards during dock hours, where there is a staffer on deck to help you get on and off the equipment and show you how to use it. We also took a boat cruise, offered several times per week, and got another vantage point on Austin and the Texas Hill Country. In the summer, the Quench! water program emphasizes these activities, though they are also offered year round.



Be sure to check out one of the cooking demos during your trip. (Photo: Lake Austin Spa Resort)

Don't miss: The cooking class. The food is outstanding. The French chef fuses classic techniques with local flavors. Be sure to check the schedule for upcoming star chefs and wine experts during the Culinary Experience weeks: Gail Simmons, Hugh Acheson, Eric Asimov, and Sara Moulton are a few of the headliners this year.

The fro-yo. That's all I'm going to say. Just try it.

Hammock time. Take a book and a pillow from your room and plan for time lost swinging to the beat of your own drum.

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There might not be any cell service in the spa, but when you're mid-pampering, we hardly think you'll notice. (Photo: Lake Austin Spa Resort)

What I didn't love: There is no cell service in the building where you receive your spa services. But honestly, who needs to check texts when hands of glory are rubbing you from head to toe?



Fantastic menus full of healthy delicious fare will keep you happy and well-fed from morning to night. (Photo: Lake

Austin Spa Resort)

What you can eat: Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served in the resort dining room and included in your stay. Wine and beer is served at lunch and dinner at an additional cost, and extended lunch is served at the Aster Café in the Spa from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. We tried the herb-crusted filet mignon with oven-roasted mushrooms, sautéed asparagus, and shallot capers au jus, for just 375 calories and 12 grams of fat. The tomato and watermelon salad with roasted cashews was also to die for. The food is shockingly good — it's healthy — but we'd prefer not to call it spa food. Just really satisfying and plays off the local flavors of the Texas Hill Country and gardens. Fat grams and calories are listed for those who wish to monitor.



From Zumbo to TRX to lakefront yoga, fitness buffs will find no shortage of great activities to keep them occupied.

(Photo: Lake Austin Spa Resort)

What you can do around here: With so much going on, you'll be hard-pressed to find a lot of down time. That's why it's nice that they allow you to do as much or as little as you'd like. For hard-core fitness buffs, there is cycling, Aqua Tabata

Interval (for upper- and lower-body conditioning), TRX (a workout developed by Navy Seals), hiking, and Kettle Bell Boot Camp. Foodies will love the cooking classes and monthly Culinary Experience, where chefs teach daily cooking classes and the director of flora and fauna leads you on tours of the resort gardens. There are yoga, Zumba, Musical Meditation, Bollywood, and a variety of evening talks, from aromatherapy workshops to discussions about the latest health research with staff dietitian Terry Shaw.

What you'll pay: Prices include all meals, fitness classes, and activities, and start at \$1,597 per person, double occupancy, for three nights. Longer stays are available, as are day-spa packages at the LakeHouse Spa.

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