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STYLE & DESIGN

These Destination Spas Are Even Better With a Plus-one

La Cantera and Lake Austin Spa offer many options for couples and friends. Massage table for two, anyone?



Lake Austin Spa Resort

The first time I went to Lake Austin Spa Resort, eighteen years ago, I was about to get married, and—in a smart move that boded well for our future together—my fiancé had given me a day at the property's LakeHouse Spa, which had just opened a few weeks earlier. What I remember most about that day is reading on a hammock on the shores of a private, quiet, glistening corner of Lake Austin and lounging by the LakeHouse pool. This, I thought, is a place I'll come back to a lot—and I'll bring a friend when possible.

I made good on that (easy) promise to myself through the years, coming for both day visits as well as overnight stays, which are the best way to take full advantage of this wellness-focused lakeside retreat some twenty miles west of downtown. It ranks among the top destination spas in the country yet is still unassuming in an “old Austin” kind of way. Perhaps that’s partly because of its history, which goes back to its days as a fishing camp in the forties. In the seventies, it had a short-lived stint as a nudist colony. Then it was a lodge for cowboys and rodeo clowns (the seventies were *wild*) before functioning as a weight-loss resort in the eighties and then, finally, becoming Lake Austin Spa in 1994. It’s now an upscale destination that attracts guests from all over the world with its idyllic location right on the lake, chef-prepared meals, three swimming pools, well-appointed accommodations, and many activities and spa treatments.

Although I still come for solo visits to recharge, I’m happiest when I can bring someone. Over the past five years, my dear friend Maya has been that person. In our matching white robes, we have explored every wallpapered nook and every outdoor cranny, looking for the best spots to read, talk, or just sit quietly together. We’ve swum laps in the covered pool barn, enjoyed a sunset sauvignon blanc on a short pier decked out in white lights, and paddleboarded side by side. We’ve spent hours under a poolside cabana talking about work, family, books, and movies. I remember one breakfast when a charming waiter tried to get us to guess the secret ingredient in that day’s muffin. “Poppyseed?” “Thyme?” we threw out. In his equally charming Italian accent, he told us: “No—it is love. How could you *miss* it?” That has since become our catchphrase.

Most recently, we carved out a late-winter day to spend together. It was a little too cold to spend much time in our favorite poolside position, but we enjoyed the luxurious warmth of the heated indoor pool, hot tub, and sauna before our treatments. The spa was letting me try its newest facial—the Regal, designed exclusively for Lake Austin by La Maison Valmont using the Swiss skin-care leader’s products. It’s one of the most expensive facials in the world—\$1,050 for a treatment lasting more than two hours that consists of four masks, a HydraFacial, LED treatment, several massages (including a facial massage based on the Japanese Kobido technique), and a collagen treatment. One of the key ingredients in Valmont’s newest line of products is sturgeon, a fact I marveled at for 135 minutes—a caviar facial!

Although I’ve yet to try Botox or anything in that realm, I do love a good facial. Knowing how expensive it is, though, made the whole experience a little stressful and uneasy—until I quickly fell asleep, despite my every intention of taking mental notes throughout the whole process. More than halfway through, the skillful technician woke me up for the collagen treatment, which normally requires covering the entire face—eyes and lips too—to make sure I didn’t need a break first. I sleepily shook my head, but as soon as she started applying the treatment, I felt like I couldn’t breathe. We compromised and decided to forgo the lips and eyes—my visions of plump puckers dashed just like that—and I immediately relaxed again.

When I rejoined Maya for a glass of wine by the water—it was now warm enough to sit lakeside—we were both a little astonished at how immediate the results were. My skin glowed, and my neck and chest especially looked at least a few years younger. This must be what having a face-lift feels like, we decided, and because that costs so much more, this really is a bargain in the scheme of things. We clinked our glasses. Then she quickly ushered me out of the sun.

—*Kathy Blackwell*