

La Belle Hélène

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LUCIAN *relaxation*

For the island's Year of Wellness, we introduce some of the most soothing, stress-relieving experiences on Saint Lucia.

By Antony Bolante



BOB LANGRISH

Close your eyes. Breathe in, slowly. Now release your breath, and with it, your tension, the pressures of everyday. Now, how perfect would it be to open your eyes to the clear waters of the Caribbean Sea, the white sands of Sugar Beach and the twin Pitons rising from a lush, green rain forest? In other words, to open your eyes in Saint Lucia? The ideal holiday can be many things: exciting, novel, edifying. But above all, it should be relaxing and restorative. It should be a true departure, not only from your ordinary surroundings but also from ordinary concerns and the fatigue accumulated in tiny, daily increments. Fortunately, Saint Lucia provides the perfect setting to relieve the body and nourish the spirit. From healing baths and massages to rejuvenating skin treatments and wellness practices, the island's many resorts and natural features provide ample opportunities to renew your sense of well-being.

PAUL BRONKHORST/GETTY IMAGES



HOT SPRING HISTORY

Long before it became a favorite tourist destination, Saint Lucia's southwestern town of Soufrière was known for its hot springs, heated by the same geothermal forces that gave rise to its namesake volcano. As early as the late 1700s, French soldiers bathed in the therapeutic, spring-fed mineral baths commissioned by their king, Louis XIV.

Today, natives and visitors alike can still enjoy the benefits of Soufrière's Sulphur Springs Park and restored mineral baths. The collapsed mouth of the volcano, or caldera, is easily accessible by car, earning Soufrière the reputation as the world's only "drive-in" volcano. There, you'll be welcomed by vents of steam, boiling mud, and the distinctive smell of sulfur. (In fact, *soufrière* is French for "sulfur," a mineral found in volcanic deposits.) The spring's source is too hot for visitors to approach too

closely, but just a few hundred yards downstream, its temperature is just right for a healing mud bath. The hot, mineral-rich mud is said to increase circulation, invigorate the skin and even treat skin conditions.

For a more refined experience — a visit to Sulphur Springs Park is a muddy one, after all — you may opt for a spa that utilizes volcanic mud as part of a massage or healing wrap. Some spas, like the **Spa at Ladera** and Fond Doux Resort's **Mama La Terre Spa** offer the best of both worlds: they deliver you to Sulphur Springs Park accompanied by a massage therapist who will do it in honour of swathing you in Soufrière's famous mud and provide a soothing massage upon your return to the spa. **Rainforest Spa at Sugar Beach** will even lounge you under the gorgeous Tora Waterfalls before returning to the spa for your massage.

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NATURAL BEAUTY

Unsurprisingly, Saint Lucia's breathtaking natural beauty often becomes a key ingredient in a spa treatment, enhancing the effects of any massage, scrub or meditative practice.

The **Sugar Beach Resort** is situated in a pristine rain forest at the base of the Petit Piton mountain, and extends to a white-sand beach and the shimmering Caribbean Sea. The spa itself is a network of seven stunning gazebos of latticed wood and thatched rooftops, like luxurious treehouses set seamlessly into the lush landscape. The Rainforest Spa also includes the **Stone Room**, a large, earthen steam dome. In this beautiful and unique version of a sweat lodge, you can purify yourself in an Amerindian ritual called *tezmocal*.

At the boutique hotel **Cap Maison**, you can take a body massage — hot stone, Swedish, or deep tissue to name a few — in **Spa Maison** itself, located in the resort's main house. But why not further enhance the experience, and enjoy your massage on the terrace, or under a garden gazebo? You can even take your massage on **Rock Maison**, a private deck below the restaurant **The Cliff at Cap** that practically hovers over the swirling tides. Afterwards, relax in Cap Maison's seemingly borderless infinity pool, whose waters appear to blend into the ocean view.





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HEALTHY BODY, SOOTHED MIND

Naturally, physical well-being can't be separated from mental peace of mind. That's why along with massages, facials, scrubs and wraps, most Saint Lucian spas offer fitness activities, yoga and meditation. Jade Mountain Resort's **Kai En Ciel** spa specializes in treatments that draw from Ayurveda, an ancient Hindu system of medicine dedicated to integrating the body, mind and spirit. Kai En Ciel offers several ayurvedic massage treatments, including a Rainbow Body Massage, designed to balance the seven chakras, your body's centers of spiritual power. Experienced instructors can also facilitate your yoga practice or guide you in calming meditation to balance body and mind.

Total well-being is the core philosophy at the luxury, all-inclusive resort **The BodyHoliday**. This expansive resort and wellness center helps you design a personalized holiday experience from a vast list of amenities, treatments and activities. Included in the package is a daily wellness treatment of your choice: a coconut and spice massage, or a Lucian lime-and-ginger scrub, to name just a few. Or you can try thalasso therapy, a form of hydrotherapy that uses massaging jets of seawater to infuse the skin with beneficial minerals and stimulate circulation and muscle tone.

Numerous ayurvedic treatments take place in their own ayurvedic Temple, built by Indian craftsmen. Experts can even consult you on the benefits of an ayurvedic diet. Of course, along with an array of fitness and sporting activities, you can incorporate yoga, meditation and tai chi into your personalized holiday.

Whether you choose an all-inclusive resort or an indulgent visit to a day spa, rest assured that Saint Lucia will help you elevate your island getaway into an idyllic journey of total wellness. ▲



LOCALLY GROWN

The treatments and unique products found at Ti Kaye Resort's **Kai Koko** spa find inspiration not only in Saint Lucia's natural beauty but also its local ingredients. Creole for "coconut house," **Kai Koko** is literally crafted from coconut wood, and set into a cliff overlooking the sands of Anse Cochon. The facial treatments offered here are based on hibiscus, papaya and blends of citrus. Or you can indulge in a body wrap treatment of seaweed, sulphur mud or even cocoa. After a day in the sun, their signature aloe and banana-leaf wrap will rehydrate your skin and relax your body. It's like retreating into a comforting cocoon from which you emerge reborn.