

eco travel

Take an active spa vacation

Colleen Friesen

I remember the exact moment of my epiphany. It was in Key West.

A hot breeze rattled the palm trees as I swerved my rented bike around jay-walking chickens. Perched on a banana seat, with hands outstretched on angled handlebars, I laughed like a child again. Wheeling toward the harbour, I spotted a cruise ship that imposed itself over this Florida port like a floating high-rise.

Passengers shuffled down the gang-plank and boarded trolley cars to travel a town that was not only flat, but only

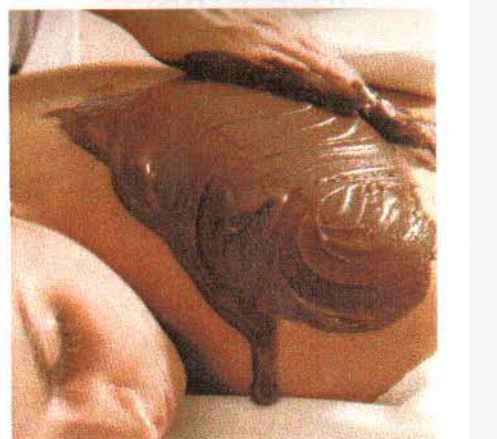
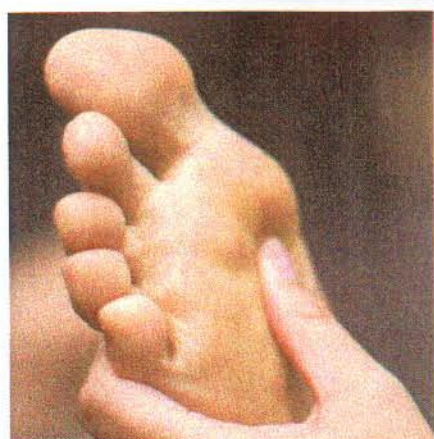
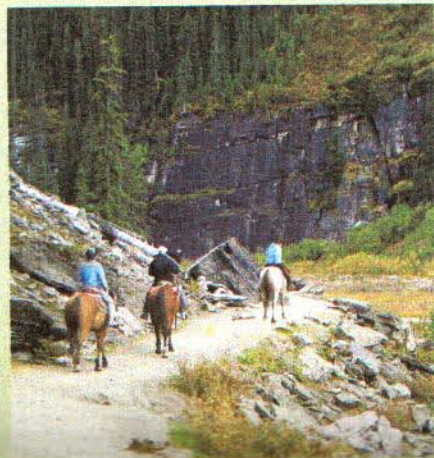
a few blocks square. I searched, without success, to see a happy face.

When they returned, most of the passengers carried T-shirt bags and licked drippy waffle cones. I imagined them ticking Key West off their list of places visited as they got back to their all-you-can-eat buffet on board. These people had spent thousands of dollars to touch the surface of an experience. They would return home, with bloated credit cards and bloated bellies to match.

That's when it clicked

Those passengers helped me decide, right then, that I would always travel actively and engaged, rather than passively and disengaged. I would never just sit in a trolley car and allow a taped narrative to wash over me.

Since that time, whether I've walked for miles along the hard sands of the wild West Coast near Tofino, sat astride a horse in Cariboo country in BC's Interior, or biked along the Red



River near Winnipeg, my trips have met one common goal: to stay active on a spa getaway. Healthy holidays are gifts to myself, so that I not only feel good through exercise but gain the added bonus of deluxe treatment. Each day's exercise ends with a sighing, releasing, oh-my-goodness massage.

The next time you plan a vacation, save yourself the stress of international airport security checks and nasty exchange rates. Instead, check out some of the spa vacations that are available in your own backyard.

Indulge a little

Healthy spa vacations are a chance to escape from the regular, even if it's just for a few days. Getting away helps us gain perspective and learn new habits.

A spa vacation is a fine alternative to indulgent trips that deliver you home feeling worse, rather than

better. People who choose healthy holidays report feeling revived, energized, and stimulated by learning new skills, meeting new people, and treating themselves well.

There is a difference between spoiled indulgence and pampered respect. Think of a small child: spoiled indulgence would be allowing them to lie in front of the television with a bowl of candies, chocolates, and chips. However, pampered respect gets those same kids out swimming, building sandcastles, eating a colourful, nutritious picnic, and then coming home to a bubble bath before bed. Spa getaways are your chance to treat your inner and outer kid with the same kind of pampered respect.

It's a satisfying indulgence to lick sauce from your fork when you know that its intense flavour comes from patient reductions rather than a reliance on heavy cream and butter. A facial feels totally pampering when

you've been horseback riding in the dusty outback all day. A reflexology session causes happier moaning when you've just come back from a long, pine-scented hike.

Travel-healthy holidays are the ticket. Whether you attend a workshop weekend to learn drumming, cooking, yoga, or to bring out your inner drama queen with mentorship from a member of the Cirque du Soleil, Canadian spa getaways offer you a chance to grow and awaken your creativity. You'll find a safe environment to try something new, to experience the surge of accomplishment, and to feel truly alive.

Pampering is great. But remember the respect. Take a healthy holiday. Come back with a spring in your step and fewer knots in your neck. **B**

Colleen Friesen lives in Sechart, BC, where she enjoys the West Coast life of lakes, bikes, and Birkenstocks...unless she's at the spa or on a trip.

So hard to choose . . .

Find an interactive map of many of the Canadian spas awaiting your visit on the Find a Spa page of the Leading Spas of Canada website (leadingspasofcanada.com).

