



At the Hillcrest spa in Port Hope, Ont., you can be lulled by the sounds of nature while enjoying a massage (choose from a menu that includes Swedish and aromatherapy) in a cedar gazebo nestled at the edge of a forest.

PARADISE, HOME AND AWAY

EACH ISSUE, WE TAKE YOU ON A JOURNEY—IF NOT IN BODY, THEN IN MIND—
TO UNIQUE SPAS BOTH HERE AND ABROAD BY MARGARET SWAINE

The Hillcrest Victorian Inn Ontario

This hilltop mansion, circa 1874, was just the retreat I needed after finishing a series of gruelling assignments. The spa is located in Port Hope, a well-preserved Victorian town on the shores of Lake Ontario, about an hour's drive east of Toronto and two hours west of Kingston. Hillcrest uses the holistic and organic Dr. Hauschka skincare line, and I tried the three-day Dr. Hauschka Rebalance Detox Program that included "feeding my inner beauty" with ingestible bee pollen, a bath with spruce, rosemary and lemon that left me with glowing, healthy skin, and special no-meat, no-dairy meals that were gourmet quality.

For a fun escape, get together three girlfriends and book the Valenova Suite on the top floor to enjoy gabbing in your own private outdoor hot tub. Or go solo, as I did, and enjoy the views of Lake Ontario or hikes in six hectares of forest. As for my positive experience at Hillcrest, it's shared by SpaFinder, a global spa resource, which awarded it in 2007 with a Reader's Choice Award for best spa in three categories—spa cuisine, boutique and going solo. (Thehillcrest.ca)

Olavesen Spa Grand Hotel Norway

Norway is a dark country in winter—northern residents see no sun at all for a few weeks in December and January—so as the days get shorter and darker in September, the appeal of the swish Olavesen Spa in Oslo is obvious: one of its main features is light therapy. "Without light, there is no life," says Marianne Olavesen, co-founder of the spa. Various wavelengths and colours of natural light without UVA and infrared are used during facials, massages and algae baths to "trigger different functions in cells of the body," claims the spa. For example, my "Lightox" facial used stimulating red light to supposedly encourage collagen production and help plump up my aging skin. Olavesen originally developed the light-wavelength system to help cure acne. The coolly unique spa incorporates Norwegian design elements and materials—the swimming pool, for example, resembles a dark forest plunge pool of spring water, complete with birch trees around its perimeter. How do you say bliss in Norwegian? "Lykksalighet!" (OlavesenSpa.com)



BRING HOME THE SPA After a stressful day, renew yourself with Dr. Hauschka Lemon Bath, which includes skin firming and invigorating natural ingredients and essential oils (\$31, 150 mL).

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