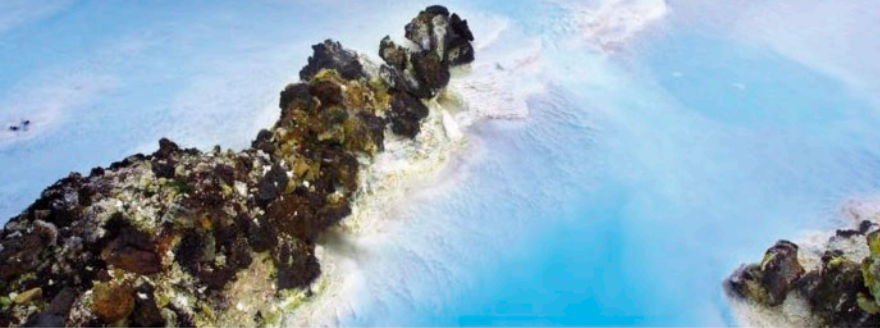


The Healing Waters

“Taking the waters” is a time-honored tradition that can be very therapeutic. BY SARA ALTSJUL



Before modern medicine, “taking the waters” attracted millions seeking relief from health problems. In the United States, towns named Hot Springs sprang up in Arkansas, South Dakota, North Carolina, and Montana.

In Europe, balneotherapy—the official term for bathing in mineral waters to heal—is still in common practice. “European physicians prescribe balneotherapy for arthritis, skin disorders, stress-related illnesses, and other problems,” says Sussanna Czeranko, a naturopathic physician and adjunct faculty member at the National College of Natural Medicine in Portland, Oregon.

Where can you go to experience such healing? Here are some of the best-known examples.

THE BLUE LAGOON GRINDAVIK, ICELAND

BLUELAGOON.COM

Set in an otherworldly location of uncommon beauty, Iceland’s seawater Blue Lagoon, *above*, contains a one-of-a-kind blend of sodium, silica, calcium, potassium, and blue-green algae. For the millions who come yearly to relax in the volcanically heated water, it’s a place of tranquility. But its most dramatic powers are felt by people with psoriasis. In 1996, researchers found that daily baths for a week in the milky blue waters reduced psoriasis plaques by 40 percent. Longer treatments yielded even better results. The water is so effective for a condition that is so difficult to treat that the national health programs of several countries pay for people to be cared for there. U.S. insurers, sadly, aren’t as enlightened. A weeklong stay for two, with psoriasis treatments for one, including room and meals, is about \$2,000. A day pass is about \$25.

CRYSTAL HOT SPRINGS HONEYVILLE, UTAH

CRYSTALHOTSPRINGS.NET

Native Americans knew of the soothing powers of what is now called Crystal Hot Springs, a site in the Wasatch Mountains where a hot and a cold spring bubble up within 50 feet of each other. Local chiropractor Kyle Klein, of Brigham City, says he regularly recommends bathing at Crystal Hot Springs to his patients with arthritis. “The waters don’t cure arthritis, but they do reduce the inflammatory process and ease pain,” he says. A two-day pass is \$15.

HOT SPRINGS, HOT SPRINGS, ARKANSAS

HOTSPRINGS.ORG;BUCKSTAFFBATHS.COM

Arguably America’s most famous water therapy town, Hot Springs was designated a national park in 1832. “There’s magic in the naturally therapeutic waters of Hot Springs National Park. A hot mineral bath will

WELL-BEING

healthy you

melt away your tension and calm your spirits,” says former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, now the host of Fox News Channel’s program, *Huckabee*.

Therapists at the town’s hospital use a 50-foot pool filled with thermal waters from Hot Springs National Park to help people recover from strokes, surgery, and accidents, and as treatment for arthritis, osteoporosis, lupus, and fibromyalgia. Try the traditional water treatment at Buckstaff, the only remaining bath house in the park. You get a thermal bath soak, whirlpool, loofah rub, and Swedish massage for \$50.

WARM MINERAL SPRINGS NORTH PORT, FLORIDA

WARMMINERALSPRINGS.COM

This 14-acre, 230-foot-deep sinkhole circulates over 9 million gallons of water per day, infused with the richest density of minerals of any known warm-water spring in the world. It’s a constant 87 degrees. “It’s perfect for soaking and swimming,” says Nathaniel Altman, of Brooklyn, New York, author of *Healing Springs: The Ultimate Guide to Taking The Waters*.

“Warm Mineral Springs is so dense with minerals and buoyant that you float weightlessly, which makes it excellent therapy for anyone with painful conditions like arthritis,” says Carola Koenig, a licensed massage therapist who practices in nearby Naples. A day pass is \$20, \$14 for students, and \$8 for children under 12.

PLUTO MINERAL SPRINGS FRENCH LICK, INDIANA

FRENCHLICK.COM

In the early 1900s, several trains a day arrived in French Lick—a picturesque town in southern Indiana—so that visitors could vacation and partake in the waters of the sulfur-rich Pluto Mineral Springs. To accommodate the

Your Own Mineral Springs

If you can’t make it to a hot spring, try this DIY treatment from naturopath Sussanna Czeranko right before bedtime. Add two to three pounds of Epsom salts to a tub full of warm water. The water shouldn’t feel hot or cold, rather neutral to the touch. If you have a thermometer, it should read about 98°F. Then, once you’re in, let hot water flow in until the bath is comfortably warm. Drink a glassful or two of fresh water as you bathe. Relax in the tub for about 20 minutes, then wrap up in your warmest flannel jammies and hop into bed under the covers. Don’t be surprised if you have an extraordinarily restful sleep.

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travelers, two stunning resorts were built around the springs. After decades of disrepair following the Great Depression, the French Lick Springs Hotel and the West Baden Springs Hotel were recently restored to their original grandeur. For \$40, you can soak in the mineral springs water in the spa area of either hotel to alleviate stress, ease aches, and clear your skin. The sulfurous scent is powerful, but the relaxation is complete.

RIVERBEND HOT SPRINGS TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES, NEW MEXICO

NMHOTSPRINGS.COM

This desert town sits over a natural hot spring, whose waters come out of the ground at 102°F to 115°. “I have a slipped disc, and recently the pain got to me. After I took a 45-minute soak, the pain was all but gone,” says Dr. Eve Elting, an internist who practices in town. “I also recommend the waters to people with osteo- and rheumatoid arthritis and to people under stress.”

Riverbend Hot Springs offers public and private pools on the banks of the Rio Grande starting at \$10 an hour.