

# European SPA VACATION

Intrepid spa enthusiast **Deborah Mangum-Copelli** ventures into the traditional heartland of the spa/sauna marriage and finds language is no barrier to health and happiness.

**W**hen was the last time you sweated it out in a large sauna, scantily dressed, with your partner and best friends, while dark German bread baked in the oven in front of you? And when can you remember lying on a bed of “first cut” alpine field hay atop a dry water bed before being moor-mud wrapped, swaddled and lowered into a floating chamber? And have you ever sat in a hot, dry, copper-oven sauna room with evergreen fir branches and needles as the floor, ceiling and walls? Designed to give you the fresh effervescent aroma of pine and fir to aid in your “kur” or cure, it’s just another one of the many experiences only available at a Haslauer-equipped spa and best tried right there in Airing, Germany, at the Reiter Alm Spa.



Situated in the Bavarian Alpine region of southern Germany, Reiter Alm can be shrouded in dense fog, rain and mist for much of the year, so “light therapy” is one of the must-haves to maintain optimum health. Founder and inventor, Paul Haslauer, developed a Middle-Eastern/Sahara desert-like experience room, complete with soft, fine sand to lie on while soaking in low-level ultraviolet rays to stimulate the metabolism. Adorned with hand-painted desert scenes on the walls around, you really feel you’re on holiday to bask in an exotic sun for twenty minutes. The “Sabbia Med” concept is unique and functional at the same time while adding that dream-like element of fantasy as an escape from everyday life.

Words can’t describe the unusual and bizarre spa experiences developed by eccentric genius, Paul Haslauer. Reiter Alm Spa-Hotel-Restaurant is set atop an alpine village amid the rolling hills of farmland Germany. Without a doubt it’s unique and memorable. Reiter Alm, the “Art of Life” contrasts a folksy Bavarian hospitality with five-star spa cuisine and treatments that leave you in awe and desiring more. Just like the fairytale castles dotting the landscape of countryside Bavaria, Reiter Alm allows its guests to experience “Spaland”. If only the pictures on their website could show how you feel with each treatment and experience... but do take a look on [www.hausler.com.de](http://www.hausler.com.de) and

find out for yourself. You can choose English on the site if you don’t “sprechen sie deutsch”.

For the ultimate couples’ treatment, try and grasp this one: you and your partner lie atop a large, round waterbed in an enclosed capsule where you paint a warm white goat’s milk potion onto each other’s naked bodies. The bed is pre-programmed to run for a specified time with a rock-a-bye-baby motion and the finale is that your king-size water capsule closes up like a clam shell, and the two of you, in all your slippery glory, are forced on top of each other to end a journey unequalled and unexperienced anywhere but in a “Salve-in-Terra” room. Oh, and while you’re lying there, you can ponder the starry sky above while steam envelopes you, keeping your goaty body potion soft. The climax of this spa event is that your clam shell water bed opens and a light but effective Vichy-type shower comes raining



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over you from above, to wash away all traces of the goat’s involvement . Vladimir Putin has one of these installed in his home... I don’t even want to imagine that one!

With all these heat and sauna treatments you’ll welcome a “Millwheel shower”. Yes, it’s a real watermill that douses you in cold or hot water, depending on the lever you pull. You might ask, as did I “Do I wear my swimmers for all these co-ed spa experiences around the indoor and outdoor grounds of Reiter Alm? And the puzzling reply was no, not at all. Next question: is it ok if my husband and I wear our swimmers? Yes, of course you can — but you’ll be the only ones in a swimsuit — and we were!

Reiter Alm, Spa, Hotel and Restaurant, nestled on its hill in a small alpine village in south-eastern

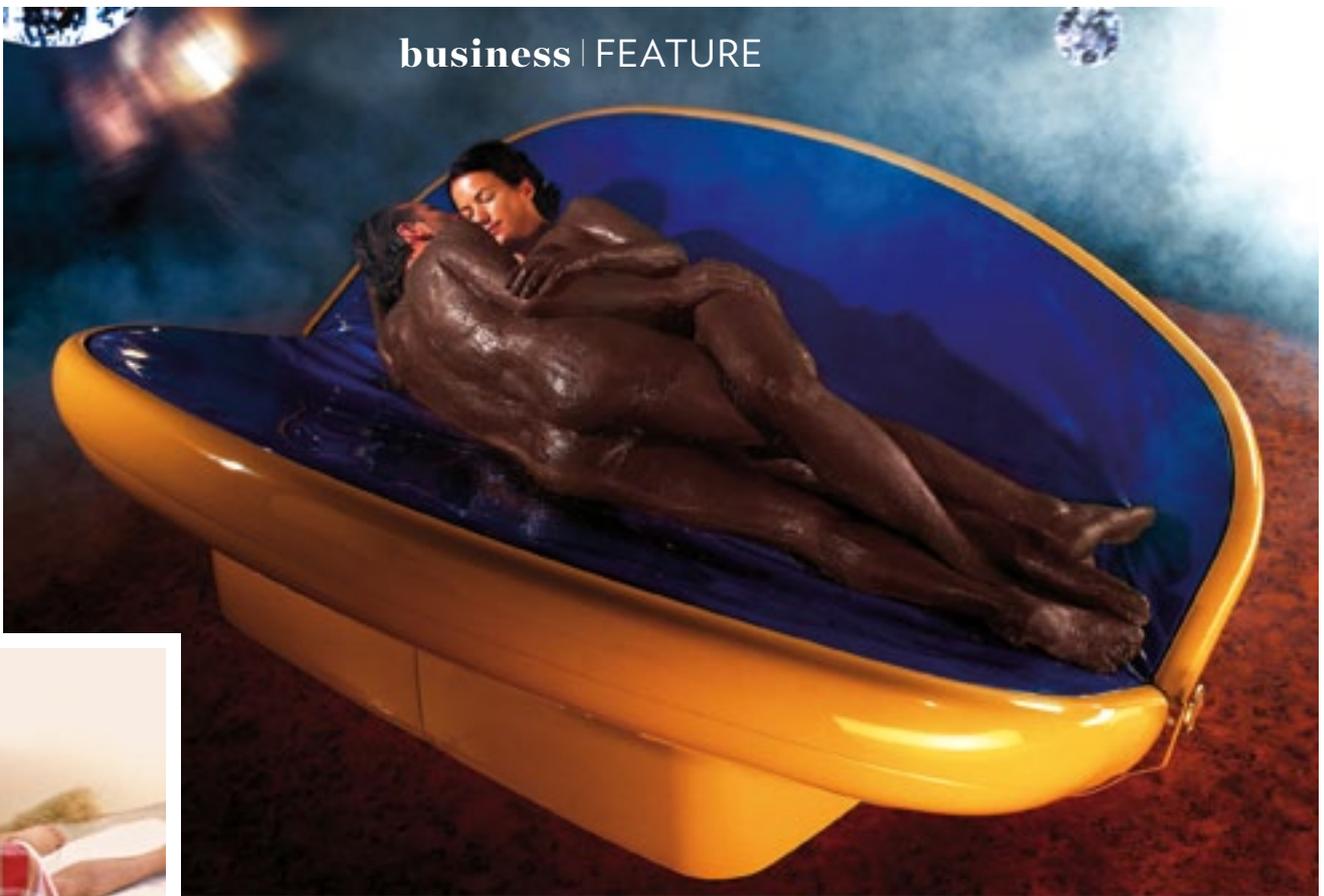
Germany brings in visitors from all over the world because of its unique but traditional spa experiences. It’s one of those “you have to try it to believe it” type of European spas. Just a few hours’ drive from Munich and only 20 minutes from the centre of Salzburg, Austria, it’s the sort of place where you could stay for the “kur” — or cure — for a week or just pop in for an afternoon of spa treatments. Before you venture there be sure to pack your Nordic walking sticks, rain parkas, swimmers (or not) and fleece, as it’s very near the Austrian Alps and the weather is both spectacular but unpredictable.

I could easily devote this entire story on Reiter Alm as there were so many other experiences to list , but I’ll just give them a mention and you can do your own exploration online to find out more. Be sure to check out the salt inhalation space where you’ll experience a Salt Brine Light Room with a mountain of brine bringing you good ions for your health. And then there’s the Snowfall and Ice Fountains and the King’s Bath Tub which is cast in copper for optimum heat consistency; the Hamam massage beds and beautifully decorative rasul where you’ll feel you’ve gone to Turkey for stimulating scrubs and moor mud wraps. And the most widely known, “Soft-Pack system” dry wet-bed, which surpasses any I’ve ever tried.

And because Mr. Haslauer didn’t feel he’d invented enough at the ripe age of 70, he’s come up with the transportable “Body Conclusio”. It’s a chair-style steam bath on wheels so it can be moved into any space, even into a hotel room. It uses very little water, producing humid steam and heated with infrared light to warm the herb packs that conveniently fit behind it to infuse into the guest’s back and for inhalation therapy. The best way to experience a Haslauer Spa is to visit their spa farm in Ainring, Germany, but if you can’t do that, their equipment is on cruise ships and spas around the world. Hopefully you’ll be able to experience a Haslauer spa; it’s well worth the trip.

How many senses do you have? Well, the Parisians now have six they can enjoy at a relatively new Six Senses Spa just adjacent to The Westin, Paris. Utilising a relatively small space on two levels, this spa concept works very well in Paris. As you enter there’s a mossy green ceiling-to-floor vertical wall garden studded with over 100 species of plants, herbs and flowers. As you then approach reception at the end of the stairwell, you notice striking timber bamboo-wrapped cocoons, each one a spa treatment room. Bringing a taste of Asia to Paris in a subtle but





unique way, Six Senses has integrated their concept beautifully. Interestingly they have positioned a live camera atop the outside of the spa building so projections of the Arc de Triumphant can be viewed inside on the walls of the spa. It's live and real as you can see birds and aircraft flying by. Once inside the bamboo cocoons you are in the hands of the Parisian therapists trained meticulously by Six Senses.

Not just another French day spa in Paris, Six Senses has successfully integrated an Oriental theme; in fact so well it was very difficult to get an appointment. Take a look at this little gem on 3 Rue de Castiglione, 75001 Paris or on [www.sixsensespapas.com](http://www.sixsensespapas.com)

Two other lovely spas we visited in France were Le Chabichou & Spa in Courchevel 1850 in the French Alps near the famous Mont Blanc, and a proper thermal mineral spring "cure" spa in Aix-les-Bains, overlooking Lake Bourget.

Le Chabichou & Spa in Courchevel is at the top village of the Courchevel ski fields at 1850 metres. Just inside this very posh hotel is a wonderful day spa for guests and locals to enjoy. Equipped with the latest state of the art spa facilities you could sauna, aroma-steam, drench, dunk, swim or hydrotherapy to your hearts' content. The high altitude setting leaves you literally breathless, but the treatments at this spa bring you right back to earth. A relaxing five-star spa experience was on offer here with the added feature of an aqua-gym and aqua-biking. Hydro-spa facilities from Monte Carlo supplied and fitted out all of this snowy mountain Spa.

Coming down the mountain and a few hours drive away is a famous little spa town called Aix-les-Bains. Known to the French as a "cure spa", it

originates in Roman times in accordance with their traditional baths but has recently been re-launched and built new above the original grand spa building. We had to queue for quite some time to even get into the day spa facilities and pools and could only manage to get one half-hour massage several days later as it was so heavily booked. Because the French enjoy cure spas as part of their public health prescriptions, many guests were coming from all over France for a two-week to one month "cure".

This French cure spa was a very tightly organised and well-run facility and I was most impressed that everyone used the thermal waters, sauna and steam rooms. There were young lovers and families with three generations coming together in the hydrotherapy jets and water massage circuits. Aix-les-Bains Spa even had a "swim against the current" area and strong waterfalls all at different temperatures depending on your tolerance to hot and cold treatments. It was a fun day where you could use some gym equipment or take Aqua classes or just swim and play in the different indoor and outdoor pool therapy areas. Find out more on [www.valvital.fr](http://www.valvital.fr)

Europe is a true spa playground with so many unique experiences to enjoy from country health farm spas to exotic urban retreats and hot thermal spa springs in amazing high mountain settings. It's no wonder many of our spa treatments and products have origins in Europe, steeped in so much tradition. I hope you will also have an opportunity to spa in Europe; it's educational, mind-expanding and relaxing so be sure to take time for yourself to enjoy in return some of what you give every day! ■