

Hot Stone Barrage

At a growing number of upscale resorts, rest and relaxation means offering slews of activities to appease antsy guests *Written by Erin Graham*

In anticipation of a relaxing getaway to The Lodge at Woodloch, a spa resort in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains, I found myself calculating how early I'd need to wake up in order to drive the three hours to make the 9 A.M. Great Wall of Yoga class. Sure, getting out the door by 5 A.M. would push my already-quivering stress needle into the red—but how could I pass up a chance to dangle from a “pelvic inversion swing”?

In the days leading up to my trip, my mind kept wandering back to the larger dilemma: how best to take full advantage of The Lodge's “superb amenities, with every conceivable choice for contentment and challenge available”? Should I walk the new Lotus Labyrinth or attend a lecture on the new Lotus Labyrinth? Either way, I'd need to cram in sufficient spa time to reap the healing benefits of The Lodge's latest service (a “chocolate journey,” involving cocoa beans) and to find out what “wildcrafting” could possibly be. Then there are the back-to-back fitness classes—my personal Achilles' heel. Relaxation will be even better as a reward after Barre and Aqua Tabata. Right?

But when I began to consider the 20 to 30 daily activities—juicing demos, painting classes, paddle boarding, archery, Beekeeping 101, edible plant walks, herbal remedy workshops and a new Forest Bathing program—the pressure started to set in.

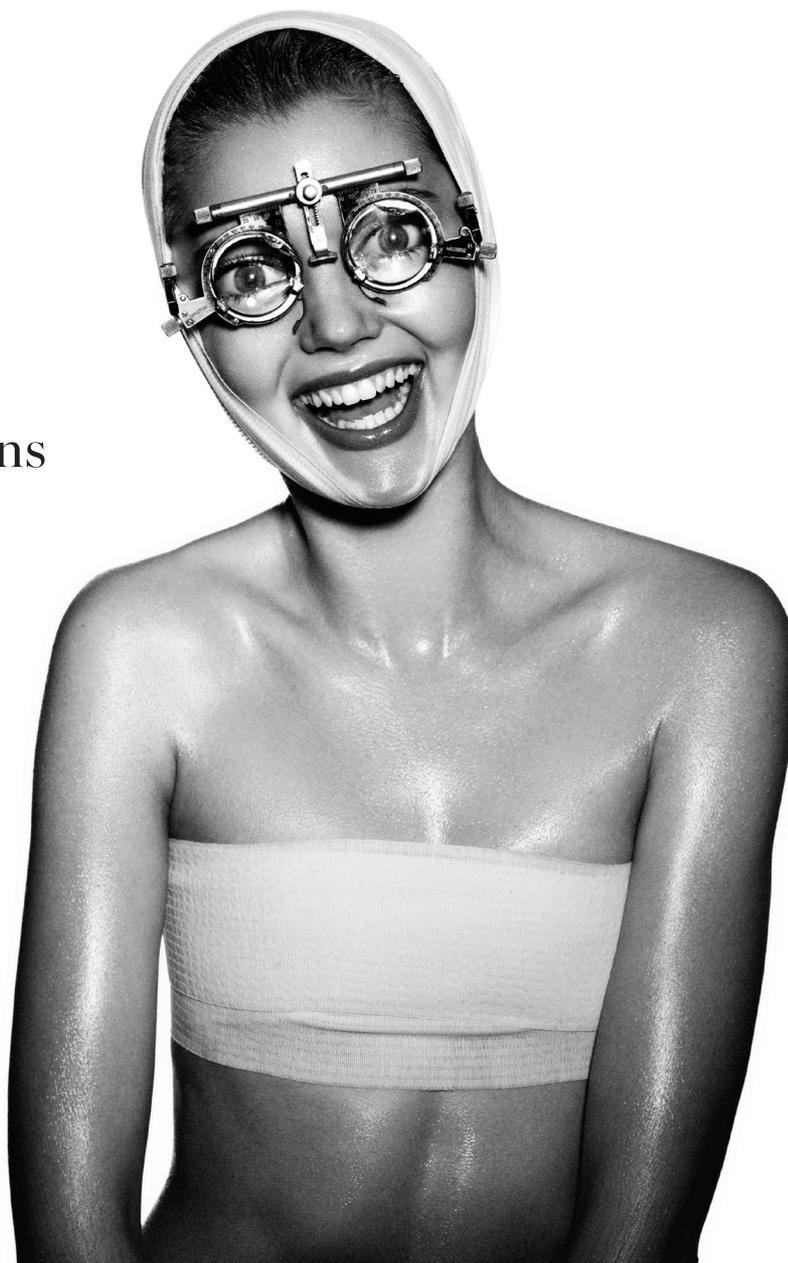
My therapist might point out that Type A people like me, who are used to self-imposed limitations—careful about all that we do and consume—tend to crack like a vegan at a barbecue when presented with too many appealing options. Or perhaps we feel this FOMO-YOLO anxiety because we just can't resist staying hyper-scheduled in order to maximize our leisure time. I admit that my activity addiction is so strong in part because it's easier to just stay “on” than to switch off. After all, as Oscar Wilde famously wrote, “Nothing is so aggravating as calmness.”

According to The Lodge, the demand for new programming is constantly growing, partly due to the pressure to

stay ahead of trends, as well as a high rate of returning guests in search of new activities. A rep notes that guests typically want to experience as much as they can during their stay; the most frequent complaint is that there isn't enough time to do everything they'd hoped.

I'm hardly alone in my love-hate relationship with downtime. Americans are known for their inability to unwind in the traditional, do-very-little sense, and we've earned a reputation as the “no-vacation nation.” According to a 2015 survey by staffing firm The Creative Group, 72 percent of executives say that if their companies offered unlimited vacation days, they wouldn't use any more than they already do.

This means that top resorts must cater to those of us who feel best when we feel productive, or who like to rack up experiences, even in the most languid of environments. Some properties offer what seems like cruise-ship-style programming—replete with glitzy nightly entertainment options and themed weekends. Hudson



Laurie Anderson, the artist and widow of musician Lou Reed, got trapped in a faulty hyperbaric chamber at a Manhattan spa for 45 minutes before freeing herself.

Valley's Mohonk Mountain House resort, in addition to its "endless activities," offers 40 theme programs a year. During a recent visit there, I saw more guests competing to solve the Mystery Weekend's whodunit than lounging fireside. (Although, to be fair, that doesn't take into account those who had opted for the blacksmith demonstration or tomahawk-throwing lessons.)

There is no shortage of luxe destinations that tempt those of us who just can't sit still. At Canyon Ranch in Tucson, Arizona, you can start your itinerary at 6 A.M., and spend the next three hours in scheduled activities while deciding on one of the nine offerings beginning at 9 A.M. Or, do you want to relax high-octane style? You can one-up your triathlete status at BodyHoliday LeSport on St. Lucia, which hosts a quadrathlon.

Help is on the way. In partnering with The St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico, meditation expert Michael Miller has witnessed many a relaxation-seeker self-sabotage their efforts to unwind. Using his new Be Here, Be Now program, guests can apply Miller's tips and techniques in order to "achieve ultimate relaxation" while at the resort.

"Saying to yourself, 'Relax!' is a losing proposition," says Miller. "We live in a society where success is measured by achievement and outcome. For high-achievers, this spills over into their supposed downtime. They can't

stop and just *be*."

His advice: "Make a list of everything you want to do at the resort—then cross off half the list." Once you arrive, "go for a 20-minute walk by yourself; not for exercise and not to get somewhere. No phone, no music. Simply go for a wander and look and listen to the place you're in." Naturally, Miller also advises ditching devices.

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This is not an easy choice to make, now that luxury travel is no longer all about unplugging. There is usually WiFi and cell service—perhaps in response to guests who can only cut down on their cortisol levels if they don't cut out communication.

My favorite pearl of Miller's wisdom comes from his background coaching at corporations on how to eliminate stress and increase productivity: "Look at rest and relaxation as something that delivers an outcome later."

It may be time to redefine "destination-relaxation" to take into account the paradise paradox, a concept that is neatly summed up in one of The Lodge's group activities (that I was too tired to try): Power Napping. ■

SECRET SPAS

Only in-the-know clientele frequent these sanctuaries



◀ ESPACE

Fans of the luxury skin-care and makeup brand Clé de Peau Beauté may know of Espace Tokyo, but there's also an NYC location in a private section of Bergdorf Goodman. Inside the compact, 240-square-foot space, guests can indulge in customized facials or Clé's signature Synactif treatment. *Clé de Peau Beauté at Bergdorf Goodman, 212-872-2726*

RENÉE ROULEAU

Every few months this revered esthetician (who counts celebrities like Sofia Vergara and Emmy Rossum as clients) offers her My Skin Prescription facial in a suite at L.A.'s Sofitel hotel. To make an appointment, you have to wait for dates to be posted on her website—and then pray you get a slot. *reneerouleau.com*

CAUDALIE BOUTIQUE SPA

This French beauty brand is known for its elaborate spa at the Plaza hotel, but clients can also get facials and body treatments at its tiny boutique spa behind an unassuming door at its West Village retail store. *us.caudalie.com*