

**SOMETIMES**, getting away is the best way to reconnect with yourself. Immersed in the sights, smells, and customs of a new landscape, you can break free from routine and reemerge with a fresh perspective. *Diablo* has searched far and wide to take you on a sensory journey that honors the ancient customs or natural elements of a particular locale. Whether pulling from the shores of the Pacific or from the fruits of Chardonnay grapevines, these five spas hold the secrets to a new place—and *maybe* even a new you.

# THE SECRET *Ingredient*



**BIG SUR**

# POST RANCH *INN*

**EVERY TIME I DRIVE** the winding 90-mile stretch through Big Sur, I'm blown away by the region's natural beauty. Here, dramatic cliffs and turquoise seas combine with hot mineral springs, indigenous history, and jade-studded coves, forming a magical landscape that I visit often for inspiration.

**Organic architecture:** In all my trips, I've never connected with the spell-binding coastline quite like I do at Post Ranch Inn, a 40-room luxury resort built to harmonize with its natural surroundings. Wood-paneled cabanas dodge giant redwood trees, ocean-front cottages wear grassy rooftops that blend in with the cliff side, and floor-to-ceiling glass walls at the Sierra Mar restaurant are all that separate me from vertical cliffs and infinite blue ocean.

**Ancient stones:** Jade is another element woven into the Post Ranch experience. Collected from nearby beaches, the dark green gemstones are encrusted in the inside of the infinity hot tub and



employed in the spa's famous jade stone therapy. Because jade can hold heat at temperatures exceeding 700 degrees, it is believed that the stones were used in early cooking by native Esselen Indians. Now, jade is heated at the spa and rubbed over the body to melt taut muscles and stimulate circulation.

**The clarity ritual:** My jade stone massage is performed in a cozy tree house-like room with views of the Ventana Double Cone mountains. As I lie on a bed of warm basalt river rocks, adorned with jade down the center of my chest, under my palms, and between my toes, my therapist tells me jade is for clarity. "Jade helps you gain perspective and see things you wouldn't have seen," she says. "It also helps you realize dreams."

**A new view:** The tension in my neck and lower back has vanished, and I feel a surprising sense of balance. Everything looks more vibrant and beautiful in Big Sur. Is this what they mean by gaining a new perspective?

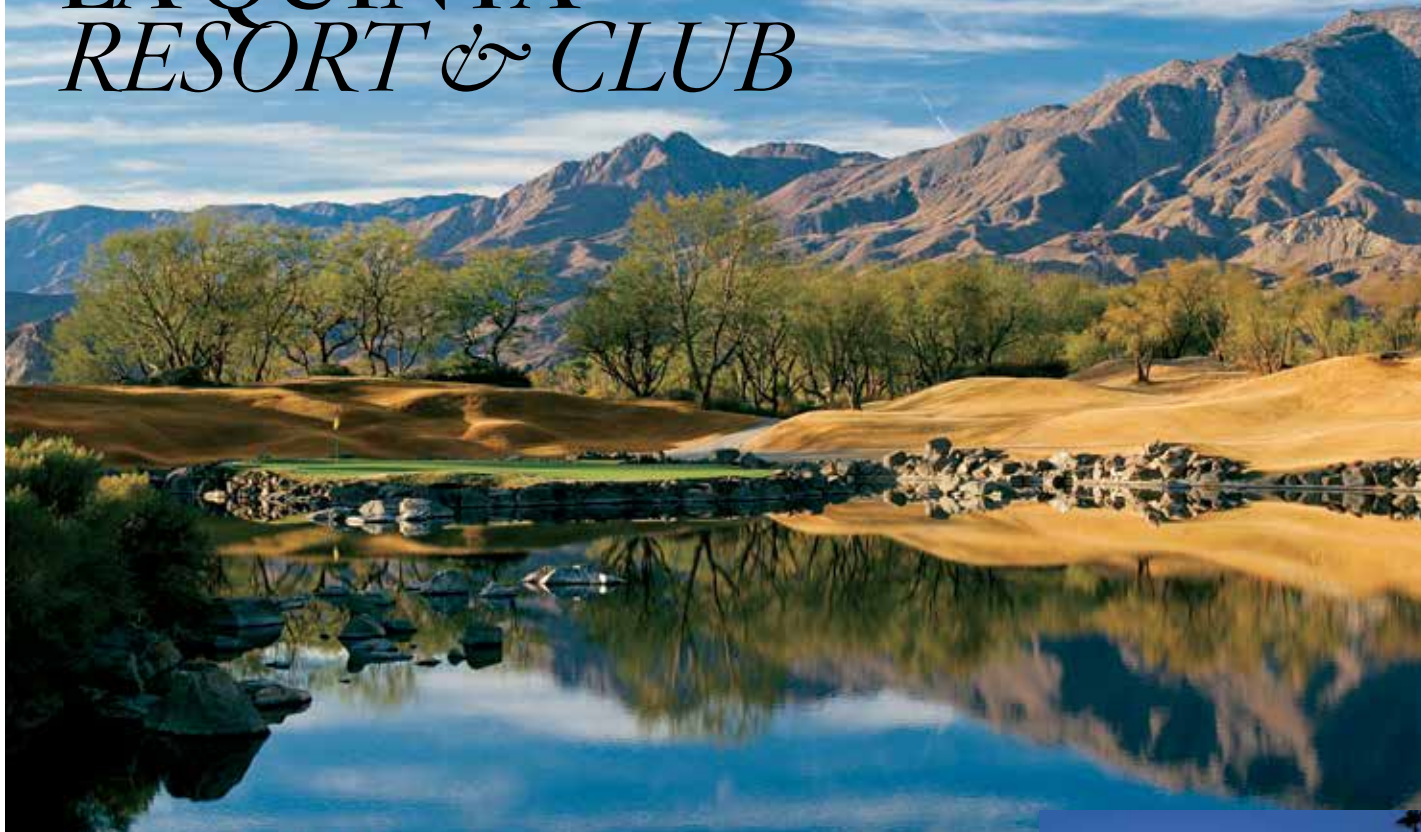
**Is it a dream?:** As I float in the jade tub next to my boyfriend, my mind wandering off into the twinkling galaxies overhead, I realize that Big Sur was the first place we had traveled to, almost a year prior. We had vowed to return, but we never imagined an experience like this. Maybe my dreams have come true after all. [postranchinn.com](http://postranchinn.com).

—SERENA RENNER

KODIAK GREENWOOD

PALM SPRINGS

# LA QUINTA RESORT & CLUB



WITH ITS MYSTICAL VALLEY surrounded by Martian-looking mountains, Palm Springs feels like a trip to another planet. This desert destination is rich in exotic beauty, and with a bounty of palm trees, an arid climate, and year-round sunshine, it offers a perfect respite from the rainy Northern California winter.

SECRET INGREDIENT  
DESERT  
SAGE



**Desert meets mountains:** La Quinta Resort and Club is an oasis of solitude and luxury, nestled against the ruggedly beautiful Santa Rosa Mountains. It's no wonder the 796-room resort, built in 1926, has hosted many a movie star in its Spanish-style suites.

**The wellness herb:** During my Native Elements scrub and massage at Spa La Quinta, a therapist sprayed me with a mist laced with local desert sage, an herb used for centuries by the area's Caahuilla Indians to open up airways and to drive away toxins and ailments. It worked for me: The sage had such a mild, musky fragrance that it gave me an immediate sense of calm and well-being.

**Around the world:** My treatment played up the desert vibe, drawing from deserts all over the globe. I was exfoliated into ecstasy with Spanish sage, lime essential oils, and Dead Sea salts, then coolly rehydrated by the local sage mist, an African shea



butter mist, and Egyptian geranium cream. The best part was the Vishy shower finish, which left me lying still 10 minutes after my treatment, lulled by the trickling fountains in the spa gardens.

**Chocolate mountain:** Any plans for a sunset hike were rubbed right out of me, as all I could do was melt into a chair and stare at the beautiful mountain jutting dramatically across a perfect blue sky. "We call that Chocolate Mountain," my therapist said. "Because when it rains, it looks like a mountain of melting chocolate."

**Warm ending:** Snag a patio booth at the property's top restaurant, Morgan's in the Desert, where fire pits keep things glowing all night. [laquintaresort.com](http://laquintaresort.com). —PETER CROOKS

TOP: JAY JENKS. OTHERS: COURTESY OF LA QUINTA RESORT & CLUB.



SECRET INGREDIENT  
 LOCAL HERBS

**SAN DIEGO**

# THE GRAND DEL MAR

**NESTLED INTO THE** surprisingly lush rolling hills of northern San Diego, the Grand Del Mar feels totally secluded—and still maintains a strong connection to the area’s natural history.



COURTESY OF THE GRAND DEL MAR

**From canyon to cuisine:** This 249-room resort exemplifies Mediterranean-inspired architecture at its finest. Colorfully frescoed domed ceilings, red-tiled roofs, and plenty of marble columns grace the property. Manicured fountain-filled gardens and four oasislike pools create a sublimely relaxed outdoor environment in which to soak up that restorative Southern California sunshine. Beyond the 18-hole golf course that surrounds the resort are hiking, biking, and horseback riding trails in the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. Here, you’ll find herbs that inspire the garden and cuisine at the Amaya restaurant, as well as treatments at the Grand Del Mar’s spa.

**Farm-fresh facials:** The spa’s line of all-organic massage products was created to complement the resort’s location and its treatments. Herbs, including thyme and rosemary, are often sourced from local farmers markets, while lavender is sometimes harvested from the hotel property for use in the house-made herbal salt scrub.

**Rosemary renewal:** During my 90-minute Renaissance treatment, I lay immersed in a cocoonlike free-floating bed, covered in mineral-rich mud and warm essential oils, with my therapist pushing my body gently into a rocking state of womb-like relaxation. Born again and washed clean by a rosemary-infused shower, I drifted off as my therapist kneaded my tension-wracked neck and shoulders into jelly.

**Ultimate relaxation:** I’m not sure if it was the massage, the dip in the outdoor relaxation pool (complete with underwater music), or the 10-minute steam in the spacious wet room, but I certainly felt renewed as I sunk into one of the plush leather recliners in the Gentlemen’s Lounge, decked in a cushy robe, sipping cucumber water. I felt relaxed both physically and mentally.

**Nature’s scent:** Make sure to book a hike with the resort’s on-site naturalist, Dylan Jones, whose enthusiasm for the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve is infectious. As you descend into a series of coastal canyons, you’ll notice how quickly the sounds of the I-5 freeway are replaced by the trickle of the year-round creek that feeds the preserve’s verdant ecosystem. I spotted thyme bushes, the deeply fragrant scent of which was familiar from my spa treatment the previous day. [thegranddelmar.com](http://thegranddelmar.com).

—ETHAN FLETCHER





**YOUNTVILLE**

# BARDESSONO

IT'S MOSTLY THE WINE, of course, that lures us to Wine Country. But at Bardessono, a 62-room luxury hotel, restaurant, and spa in Yountville, it's clear that wine appreciation goes beyond drinking: It's in the rejuvenation offered by a grapeseed oil massage and the beauty of recycled wine casks in the lounge's rich wood-plank ceiling.

**A platinum stay:** Opened in February 2009, Bardessono is not only stunning in its contemporary design but uncommonly committed to the natural landscape. Its restaurant's farm-fresh ingredients are seasonal and locally sourced (I spotted pineapple guava and wicked-hot ghost chilies in the on-site garden), solar panels provide half of the electrical supply, and salvaged building materials include tufa stone from the Bardessono family home that once stood here. It is one of only three hotels in the world to have earned LEED Platinum certification.

**Unhurried indulgence:** The spa, too, takes its cues from nature, with a seasonally changing menu

of herbs, oils, and salts. While the spa building includes treatment rooms and a rooftop pool with striking views of the Mayacamas Mountains, treatments are also available in guest rooms. A spa butler arrived at mine ahead of the massage therapist to set up a treatment table in the spacious spa-suite bathroom, leaving a row of candles along the edge of the tub and a soothing soundtrack playing from an iPod.

**Simply divine:** The vinotherapy massage features organic Chardonnay grapeseed oil from Olavie. The light seed extract is a potent antioxidant and forms a protective layer on the skin that is supposed to stimulate the renewal of cells and collagen. But as I deeply inhaled the oil's fragrance at the start of my massage, I didn't think about the science: It simply smelled divine.

**Who needs dinner?:** With the stress rubbed out of my muscles, I headed for the tub—and almost never left. In my post-massage haze, I even forgot to eat dinner. I've never felt so relaxed.

**Recycled art:** Check out the art displayed around Bardessono: Ninety percent incorporates objects that have been found or recycled. Then, venture out into Yountville on a carbon-fiber bicycle, free for guests to use. The town boasts four Michelin-starred restaurants and unlimited fruit of the vine to *drink*.

*bardessono.com.* —LEEANNE JONES



SAMMY TODD DYES



**CABO SAN LUCAS, MEXICO**

# CAPELLA *PEDREGAL*

A MERE 100 FEET FROM the Pacific in Cabo San Lucas, I swim under a waterfall that cascades into the saltwater pool for a shoulder massage before my full-body massage. When it's time for my appointment, I swim over, towel off, and hop on the treatment table.



COURTESY OF CAPELLA HOTELS & RESORTS

**Six stars:** Cabo may seem like a long way to go for a massage, but I'm a girl who pines for the tranquility of the sea. I came for the ocean, so as the sun rises, I walk Capella's private beach every morning, watching whales spout, fish jump, and rays ride the waves. Plus, Capella Pedregal is a new six-star resort that offers top-rated everything, from cooking classes with a Thomas Keller-trained chef to 66 glamorous suites, each with its own oceanfront dunk pool and fire pit.

**La agua:** Not only does Capella have a heavenly location on the Pacific, it's filled with waterfalls, water sculptures, and pools that cool, refresh, and delight. At Auriga Spa, you choose from a host of treatments, including Mexican folk rituals, signature lunar cycle-themed treatments, and sea-inspired body wraps. One that appeals to me is an aquatic massage that promises to stretch and relax me beneath the surface of the water.

**Back in the womb:** As we walk into a warm-water tub, my massage therapist whispers to me to close my eyes. I lose my bearings, and she pulls me into her arms and cradles me—her cheek next to mine, my leg over her shoulder—while massaging my shoulders, arms, and legs. I feel very safe, like a baby in the womb. But then she lets go, and for a second I fear falling until the water's buoyancy catches me. She swishes me through the water like a rag doll—which would probably feel violent on land but produces an effective full-body stretch under water. I cheat and open my eyes a few times, marveling at the beauty of the gold-flecked spa ceiling, as I gently glide through the water. I don't want this treatment to end.

**Tequila sunset:** I am way too relaxed after my massage for a sauna session, so I visit the ice room, where snow falls from the ceiling. The refreshing cool is just what I need before heading to the beach, where I order Mexico's finest tequila and watch the sun set. The magnificent location, heavenly food, beach walks, and water therapy all hit me then and there, filling me with a sense of renewal. I commit to eating well, exercising, and doing my best to maintain this healthy feeling even after I get home.

**The last swim:** Before I leave, I take the snorkel and kayak excursion offered by Outdoor Baja. I swim with the most beautiful fish I've ever seen, and in that muffled underwater state, I say farewell to Cabo. [capellapedregal.com](http://capellapedregal.com). —SUSAN SAFIPOUR