

The 20-Minute Spa Break

Mini treatments and other ways to pamper busy attendees on a tight budget

BY LISA A. GRIMALDI

When a planner pressed for time and tight on cash asked Daisy Suduran, spa director at the 527-room Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans, how to give attendees a spa experience on a shoestring, she came up with a novel idea: "Skincare 101." Instead of offering signature facials, which start at \$140, plus tax and tip, an esthetician taught the group about products and natural ingredients that can be used to resolve specific skin-care issues. Participants were given a customized recommendation and were invited to choose and use the appropriate items from a "buffet" of professional and homemade organic skin products. Each received a recipe book for making their own products at home, along with tips on how to take better care of their skin, all for a cost of \$50 per guest.

The program Suduran created is just one example of how planners and spa personnel are working together, in light of today's shortened meeting times and leaner budgets, to give attendees some type of spa component in place of traditional 60- to 90-minute treatments that can cost hundreds of dollars per attendee and eat up an entire morning or afternoon of a packed agenda.

Even if attendees have been spoiled by getting full-length spa treatments at meetings in the past, "I've never seen anyone turn down a 30-minute massage because they used to get a 60-minute massage," says Kelley Whetsell, a planner at Brunswick, Ohio-based third-party firm Meeting Demands.

Spas today, industry sources agree, are more willing than ever to customize their offerings for meeting and incentive groups. Following is a rundown of some fast, fun, creative and budget-friendly group spa experiences, along with tips on how to get the most from

resort spas.

Brief encounters

So-called "sprint" or mini treatments, which are pared-down versions of traditional massages, facials or manicures, are among the most popular ways to give attendees an affordable spa experience. According to a survey by the Lexington, Ky.-based International Spa Association, 75 percent of U.S. spas now offer these "express" (30 minutes or less) treatments, which typically are performed in the spa, in standard treatment rooms.

Among resorts that have jumped on the sprint bandwagon is the 210-room Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale (Ariz.) at Troon North. Spa director Lia Rowland says that when she looked over the facility's menu last year, "there was a glaring lack of shorter experiences. Only a small percentage of guests — from both the group and leisure side — have time for lengthy services these days." Six 25-minute treatments have since been added, including a scalp massage, foot massage, body wrap and body polish, each for less than \$100.

Other properties, like the 138-room Snake River Lodge & Spa in Jackson Hole, Wyo., don't list shorter treatments on the spa menu but certainly will perform them if the planner requests. *The Continued from page 58*

resort offers a number of 20-minute treatments, such as mini facials and target massages (concentrating on a specific area of the body), allowing groups of as many as 100 to enjoy a treatment in a



two-hour window. "We've done entire groups between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., leaving them ready for dinner at 6:30," says spa director Dwight Zieman. The key, he says, is making sure enough therapists are on hand, something the planner and spa director arrange prior to the meeting. "We have opened the spa early, stayed late and had all hands on deck for various groups," he notes.

Crowd pleasers

When time and budgets are just too tight, even for mini treatments, consider group spa stations, where one or more therapists are hired by the hour to perform as many six 10-minute "sample" treatments. In addition to being more cost-effective than longer mini treatments, these "experience stations" typically are staged right within the event space, perhaps in

the registration area or prefunction space.

At the 582-room Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes, for example, planners can organize chair massages (\$250 per hour, per therapist), paraffin hand-dip stations (\$130 per hour, per therapist) and hand massages, with or without mini manicures (\$130 per therapist, per hour).

Other options

When your budget won't cover mini treatments, but you want to participants to unwind with something more substantial than a 10-minute station massage, consider giving them a credit or spa discount that they can use during free time. If the agenda is jam-packed, ask the spa director if the facility can open earlier or later than normal operating hours to accommodate your attendees.

"I was nervous about giving the spa credit the first few times we did it," says

Kelley Whetsell. "I was concerned that attendees would feel shortchanged, but they said, 'You made my treatment cost me \$50 instead of \$150, and that made me happy.'"

When attendees contribute some of their own money toward their spa treatments, they typically don't skip their appointments, which happens all too frequently when treatments are comped. Whetsell recommends asking the hotel sales or spa contact for the credit or discount when negotiating the meeting contract. She notes, "It's in their best interest to get people into the spa."

Beyond offering discounts, spas might offer value-added services, suggests Shane Bird, spa director at the 500-room Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa in Phoenix. Possibilities include comped food-and-beverage stations in the relaxation area, free mimosas or smoothies with manicures and pedicures, comped meeting space (the Aji spa at the Sheraton has a conference room), and free or discounted spa products to use as room gifts. **mc**

Streamlining the Spa Experience

Following are smart ways to maximize limited spa time and contain costs.

• **CONSIDER THE SPACE.** To make express treatments work in a tight time frame, choose a property with many treatment rooms that can handle a large number of participants in a short amount of time.

• **SKIP THE LOCKER ROOM.** When on a tight schedule, ask the spa director if attendees can dispense with the normal protocol of changing into robes and slippers in the locker room and allow people to change or disrobe in the treatment room.

• **CONSIDER PRIVACY.** When organizing a spa station in a public area (e.g., the registration area, a corner of a ballroom), ask your hotel or spa contact to "drape" the stations with hanging gauze or other light material to give attendees a bit of privacy.

• **ASK FOR DISCOUNTS.** Is there a weekday that's particularly slow for the spa, perhaps when few locals come in or no other groups are in-house? If so,

chances are the facility would be happy to have a rush of discounted business. Planner Kelley Whetsell has saved anywhere from 10 percent to 25 percent off the published rate for treatments, even on mini treatments, simply by asking.

"If the hotel or resort sales contact won't budge, bring the spa director into the equation," recommends International Spa Association president Lynn McNees. "They may have more room to negotiate than the hotel salesperson." **mc** L.A.G.





< **A MENU OF 25-MINUTE TREATMENTS** caters to time-pressed meeting attendees at the Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North.