

them alone for 40 minutes. And the Claremont Resort & Spa in Berkeley, Calif., recently added a second flotation tank—guests lie there in the dark for an hour—to meet growing demand.

Why the touchless treatments? In an increasingly crowded field, spas are having a tough time standing out from the pack, especially as standard massages lose their novelty for repeat guests. Because they rely heavily on things like scents and auras, hands-free offerings also appeal to a generation of boomers rediscovering meditation and all things Eastern. Plus, spas say, a number of stressed-out customers are willing to pay for any quiet time at all.

Rubbed the Wrong Way

There's another reason spas like the hands-off approach, though, and it may rub a few customers the wrong way: Treatments that don't require a trained beautician or massage therapist are cheaper. While the number of U.S. spas has grown by almost 70% in the past two years—to 9,600—per-spa revenue isn't keeping pace. Last year, average spa revenue grew by just 8%, about half the previous year's growth, according to a study by PricewaterhouseCoopers. One way to cut costs is to trim workers' hours: About 37% of spa employees now work part-time, up from 30% in 2000.

Case in point: La Playa Garden's new raindrop aromatherapy treatment comes with written instructions and is "fairly simple," says Cynthia Young, director of the Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif., spa. The treatment involves dropping 10 kinds of warm oil onto a customer's body, then adding a hot compress instead of rubbing. The cost: \$200 for 40 minutes, about twice as much as a traditional massage. It's the oil that's expensive, says Ms. Young, not the labor. "I could call upon anyone to do the service as long as they can read."

Tell that to Stacy Shaw, who signed up for what seemed like a simple hot-oil treatment at her favorite day spa, and ended up with a burn between her eyes. Thirty minutes into the \$120 Ayurvedic treatment—it required a staffer to dribble warm oil over the "third eye" on her forehead—she was begging for mercy. Seven

shampoos later, the Chicago ad executive got rid of the oil caked in her hair, but not the visible red mark. "It was more like torture than something relaxing."

Granted, spas have always tried to push the envelope. While '70s-era spots touted fitness and exercise, the decadent '80s pushed treatments like Champagne facials and chocolate baths. More recently, spas have moved from gimmicky wraps made of honey or barbecue sauce to more natural ingredients, such as herbs. But as increasingly stressed-out clients seek mental benefits, too, "spas are getting more therapeutic and more spiritual," says Michelle Kleist of Destination Spa Group, a marketing association in Simpsonville, S.C. "Everybody's adding to their menu."

Keeping a Distance

Actually, not quite everybody: Some spas are keeping their distance from hands-off treatments, saying high-paying customers expect active pampering, including manual labor massages and wraps. "Nothing can replace the touch of the hand," says Carmela Renbarger, a manager at the Amangani resort in

Jackson Hole, Wyo. Her suggestion for a relaxing, hands-off treatment? "Just sit out at the pool."

Still, many spas continue to roll out the unusual offerings. Guests at Spa 500 in Little Silver, N.J., can now lie in the so-called Time Machine, while 1,200 tiny lights pulse on and off. (The spa owner says it encourages red blood cells to flow

One spa has a cloth-covered table and dried fruits hanging from the ceiling. The treatment: Lie down for an hour.

more freely and "reduces biologic age.") During the sound therapy at Florida's Spa at Turnberry Isle, an attendant vibrates various quartz bowls in the room. (It's supposed to relieve stress.) And the

Less Touchy, More Feely

Seeking to soothe stressed-out clients, spas are adding noninvasive, no-touch techniques. Below, the lowdown on where to get a non-rubdown.

SPA	COST/ TREATMENT	COMMENTS
Canyon Ranch Tucson, Ariz.	\$155 healing touch	There's no physical touch in this 80-minute treatment—the therapist (a registered nurse) waves hands a few inches above the body to relieve anxiety, pain and stress.
Equinox Resort Manchester Village, Vt.	\$75 Reiki	Resort's new spa opens in January with this Japanese technique, which uses hand movements to rebalance the body's energy. Practitioners learn secret symbols from other Reiki "masters."
La Playa Garden Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif.	\$200 raindrop technique	New in September, this treatment involves dropping 10 herbal oils onto clients' spines (oregano, thyme), back muscles (peppermint, birch) and feet, then adding a hot compress to let it soak in.
Pratima New York	\$90 Rudraksha	Guests lie for one hour on a table, surrounded by dried East Indian fruits. The spa says they give off vibrations to soothe nerves and reduce stress.
Tru San Francisco	\$100 rainforest room	Day spa slated to open February will hand clients pots of exfoliating mud to apply themselves. "Rain" from the ceiling will wash away the dried concoction. (The spa also has a shower.)
Spa at Turnberry Isle Florida	\$120 sound therapy	Customers lie prone while a therapist rings crystal bowls; the vibrations resonate through the body. Spa says about 100 guests have tried the treatment since it was added in September.