



UTAH GRAND AMERICA



The Grand America (above right) was built for the 2002 Winter Olympics; the lobby (above left) eschews understatement.

YOU COULD MAKE THE ARGUMENT THAT GRAND AMERICA is one of the best ski spa hotels in the U.S. despite its location in downtown Salt Lake City. With its chandeliers, carpets, and standard double rooms that are

700 square feet or more and have classic French furniture, lush fabrics, and marble bathrooms, it's the Rockies Ski Ritz. (It was built as the lodging centerpiece for the 2002 Winter Olympics.) You stay here for three reasons. First, you can be, courtesy of Interstate 80, at Snowbird, Alta, Brighton, or Solitude within 45 minutes. Second, there are no rooms this large and luxurious at any of them. (Grand America's rooms are akin to the top ones at Deer Valley, where they would cost three or four times as much.) Finally, it has an elegant spa.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Off-piste luxe where you'd least expect it, and a good value to boot

SPA AT A GLANCE

15,000 square feet
8 treatment rooms
20 therapists
5 aestheticians
THERAPIST TO REQUEST
Graham Gautchi

are country-club caliber. The therapist cadre is excellent. The hotel also has a good gym and a terrific indoor pool. Okay, no slopes. But you can see the peaks of the Wasatch range from your window. **US\$259–\$6,000, 800-621-4505, www.grandamerica.com**

ULTIMATE SKIER'S MASSAGE

I discovered *ashiatsu* (loosely translated as "foot pressure") this winter at the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek. After limbering up my back with hot stones and a little handwork, Karin Knittel climbed onto the table and proceeded to walk on my back while holding onto a set of parallel bars in the ceiling. Deep and penetrating, the massage felt as if she were skiing down my back and legs, gliding, stroking, using her big toes to work small spots. Karin studied *ashiatsu* in Denver with **Ruthie Piper Hardee**, who has taught hundreds of therapists this quasi-Asian treatment. "I developed **Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy out of necessity**," Ruthie says. She was working on a movie set in California, and a 250-pound stunt man asked for a massage. She thought, If I could just stand up and hold onto something... She turned to Asian back walking, which she had seen during her childhood, spent partly in Asia, but she adapted it for Western consumption, developing all the strokes herself. *Ashiatsu* is ideal for the glutes and lower back, critical for any skier.



Ski & Spa

Best of the Rockies

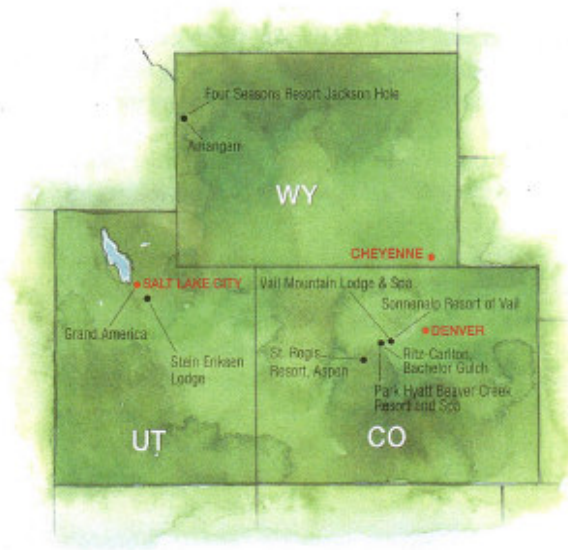
BY EVERETT POTTER

SPA IS FINALLY GETTING A STARRING ROLE AT ROCKY MOUNTAIN RESORTS. IT'S A MAJOR change. Even at the top Rockies ski resorts, spas have long been bit players at best, mainly because hoteliers believed guest rooms produced more revenue than treatment rooms. Moreover, a modest (or even no) spa never kept a resort or destination off a best-of list. Stein Eriksen Lodge in Park City, a perennial "Top 10," still has only a relatively modest spa, and until three years ago, there was not one luxury hotel in Aspen with a spa.

The advent of the Remède spa at the St. Regis Aspen in 2004 was a milestone and a harbinger. Like it, the spas that have opened since or are on the drawing board are big—Allegria at the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek is 30,000 square feet—beautifully and intelligently designed, and with a penchant for bold hydrotherapy facilities. You could almost make a stay at one of these hotels into a winter destination-spa experience, given the fitness facilities, the expertise on call, and the healthy choices at the restaurants.

For this Insider's Guide, I visited more than a dozen ski-resort spas in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming. Eight of them (plus a curveball in Salt Lake City) made the

cut as the best ski-resort spas in the Rockies, but for reasons that varied, as you'll see in my pull-no-punches evaluations. One thing remained constant, no matter what the hotel and spa were like: the high quality of the therapists. In some cases, that more than made up for the limitations of the spa. Here's my report.



THE TRIP AT A GLANCE

MOST MEMORABLE...

Couple's Treatment Room

Park Hyatt Beaver Creek

Fitness Center

Vail Mountain Lodge & Spa

Hotel Pool

Amangani

Hotel Setting

Amangani

Massage

Ashiatsu at Park Hyatt Beaver Creek and deep tissue at Four Seasons

Jackson Hole

Spa Amenities

Flavored oxygen and Jacques Torres truffles at

St. Regis Aspen

Spa Architecture

Park Hyatt Beaver Creek

Spa Feature

Aqua Sanitas hydrotherapy center at

Park Hyatt Beaver Creek

Therapists

Nastassja Flores at Four Seasons Jackson Hole,

Brian Mecham at Stein Eriksen

Lodge, and Karin Knittel at Park

Treatment Rooms

St. Regis Aspen

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN STANNEVICZ



COLORADO

PARK HYATT BEAVER CREEK RESORT AND SPA



The entrance to the new Allegria spa (above left); the Thermae (above right) is the heart of the hydrotherapy circuit.

BOOK HERE THIS WINTER TO EXPERIENCE THE NEW gold standard for Rocky Mountain ski-resort spas. The US\$12 million, 30,000-square-foot Allegria spa, enlarged from an already respectable 17,000 square feet, dazzles. The entrance, with its dramatic 23-foot-high ceiling, four reception desks, and attractive staff buzzing about, could be a set for a spa musical. Once you're past the curtain-raiser, though, the design turns thoughtful. The large, well-proportioned windows, a rarity in ski spas, allow light to pour in. (More than half of the 23 treatment rooms have windows.) The materials—maple and walnut, wrought iron, and glass panels etched with an aspen-grove motif—are mountain-sensuous.

SPA AT A GLANCE

30,000 square feet
23 treatment rooms
55 therapists
12 aestheticians

WOW FACTOR

Aqua Sanitas
hydrotherapy area

THERAPISTS TO REQUEST

Karin Knittel, Catrin
Harryson-Smith

Treatment rooms have been customized in ways that reflect the increasing sophistication of spa-goers: Ten years ago, no ski spa would have dedicated two rooms to *ashiatsu* (see "Ultimate Skier's Massage" on page 82) or equipped a couple's treatment room with a pair of Vichy showers. You could easily spend half a day in this spa, and indeed, room service is kept busy delivering lunches here.

Hydrotherapy is the big new trend in spas, and Allegria is up-to-the-minute. The 2,600-square-foot Aqua Sanitas ("Healing Waters") has all the classic features and some contemporary razzmatazz. There are separate areas for men and women, each with a large *caldarium* (hot room with a soaking pool), rain shower (here called a *Cascata*), steam room with built-

in chromotherapy (memo to management: Tone down the light show), and tepidarium, a Pompeian womb furnished with heated tiled chaises that have soft pillows. The sexes meet (in bathing suits, of course) in the Thermae, a central soaking pool with jets, cascades, and waterfalls. There's only one design flaw: a pair of swinging doors that allow guests waiting for an elevator to the second-floor changing rooms to get a glimpse of an area that should be private. My suggestion: Allot an hour in Aqua Sanitas before your treatment.

The staff's energy and enthusiasm are contagious, from the perky receptionists to the 55 therapists, a group of all-stars if my experience is any guide. Karin Knittel is a master of *ashiatsu*, and Catrin Harryson-Smith gave me the single best Swedish massage of my life—perhaps her being Swedish has something to do with it. Be sure to hit the gym. It has an entire room of Kinesis machines and racing bikes and a roster of classes that emphasize "private," from Pilates (using a Reformer and Cadillac) to snowshoeing outings led by spa instructors.

The 190-room, slopeside Park Hyatt anchors the village of Beaver Creek. Public areas have recently been redone, but the rooms could use a face-lift, too. They're comfortable but nondescript, and I don't think the bathrooms have been upgraded since the hotel opened in 1989. This matters, given that winter rates routinely run in excess of US\$600 per night. But perhaps less so with the advent of the enlarged spa: It's that good. US\$595-\$5,300, 866-471-7858, www.beavercreek.hyatt.com

THE BOTTOM LINE

The new spa gold standard in the Rockies