



Olive Oil Souffle at The Oaks at Ojai



A therapist uses a rainstick in a wellness treatment at Two Bunch Palms

# Repair Restore Refresh

## At SoCal Spas

The holidays were lovely. You danced; you dined. You wrapped and unwrapped. You entertained and were entertaining. And now you're tired. Take heart. Help is close at hand. Southern California offers a plethora of spas that offer everything you need to get your groove back. Here are two of my favorites:

### Two Bunch Palms — An Oasis Of Healing And Serenity

If it's peace and quiet you seek, head to Desert Hot Springs in the heart of the Coachella Valley. The silence here speaks volumes about nature's ability to nurture our spirits. Two Bunch Palms (TBP) asks guests to turn off cell phones, leave the kids and pets at

home, and speak only in soft voices.

Trendy fashions can also be left behind, as TBP robes are provided for strolling between The Grotto, The Spa, the Cool Pool, and the Clay Cabanas. Men and women soaking in the rock-lined pools of lithium-rich spring water get lost

in their thoughts or a good book. Those soaking in mud baths gaze out across a valley filled with towering palms and centuries-old tamarisk trees. Spa clients experience renewal of both body and soul at the hands of superb therapists.

The menu of restorative treatments includes the Ayurvedic (with two therapists using heated sesame oil specially blended for your dosha); the Native American (the Blessing of the Four Directions is followed by the heat of the sauna, a sand body scrub, and cedar oil massage); and the Wassertanzen, an expanded form of Watsu.

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These are all wonderful experiences, but my favorite Two Bunch treat is the Salt Glo as delivered by therapist David's healing hands. We started in a wet room, where he rinsed me with warm water before massaging with Epsom salt crystals. In addition to the exfoliating effect, the minerals penetrate and detoxify. After a warm shower in one of TBP's 1930s pastel tile spaces, I sat in the sauna for a few minutes, and then received a very nurturing massage with a damp cloth soaked in lemon oil to seal my pores. The treatment lasted 90 minutes and, at the end, I floated back to my room.

Speaking of lodging, of the 52 spacious rooms, most have king beds, ten have private spa pools, and seven come with kitchens. I stayed in villa 7, which had a very comfortable king bed with great linens, a private furnished



A pita, soup, and pear, all part of the fresh low-calorie menu at The Oaks at Ojai

patio, A/C, a ceiling fan, and wooden shutters.

Long a seasonal home to Native Americans, the first permanent structures at Two Bunch Palms were built by gangster Al Capone in the 1920s. Today, the historic ambience remains a big part of the property's charm. The beautiful desert surroundings, with mountains in the distance, also help to make TBP an ideal place to rest and restore after the holidays.

([www.twobunchpalms.com](http://www.twobunchpalms.com))

### The Oaks at Ojai — A Life Changing Experience

If the holidays took a toll on your psyche, then Two Bunch is your best bet.

However, if overindulging left your body feeling like a train wreck, head to Ojai, 35 miles southeast of Santa Barbara.

Here, a 1,000-1,200-calorie menu and all-day exercise options will jumpstart your New Year's resolutions.

How much you actually lose depends, of course, on your metabolism and how active you are. One frequent guest stays for three days and leaves five pounds lighter. Another woman, with long-term goals, comes for six weeks twice a year and drops about 15 pounds per visit.

Another recently stayed for 12 days and lost only 3 pounds, but "lots of inches." Then she left to attend a nine-day conference. I spoke with her on her first day back at The Oaks and she was thrilled that — with her newly learned eating habits — she hadn't gained back the weight or the inches in the interim.

In fact, I think the real benefit of this spa is learning how much food you really need and how much exercise you can handle. I never would have believed the appetite-numbing possibilities of low-cal veggies, broth, and fruit smoothies between meals if I hadn't tried them at The Oaks. ☛



A courtyard suite at The Oaks at Ojai



Mud baths at Two Bunch Palms

reflexology, aromatherapy, Thai table, and Massage.com. I especially enjoyed the Massage.com portion, which is a new therapy created by Oaks owner Sheila Cluff to provide deep tissue relief for people who work at computers for long hours. Therapist Claudia's caring hands left me feeling so mellow that I drifted right off to sleep. ([www.oaksspa.com](http://www.oaksspa.com))

The holidays were lovely. You wine and dine. Now it's time to repair, restore, and refresh. Whether you choose Two Bunch Palms or The Oaks at Ojai, I hope you'll have fun finding a new you for the New Year. ELIZABETH HANSEN

I also didn't think I was capable of five workouts a day — but it turns out I am.

While Two Bunch Palms is the perfect place for couples to reconnect or a solo traveler who wants to be alone, The Oaks is ideal for a girlfriends' getaway or sociable solos. The day starts with the option of a group brisk walk, mountain hike, or morning stroll. Joining others at mealtime is *de rigueur*. Movies and guest speakers are on tap after dinner.

In many ways, this spa feels like a college dorm — except here the classes include Yoga Essentials, Mind/Body Awareness, Core 'n More, Water Works, Aqua Tone, Pilates, Cardio Combo, and SPA Dance — and they are offered from 8am-5pm daily. In contrast to glitzy hotel spas, The Oaks is

family-owned, its staff members are long-time local residents, and its rates are affordable.

When I stay at The Oaks, I request a courtyard suite or mini spa suite, pack nothing but informal clothes, and book a spa treatment for every night. Somehow, anticipating a great after-dinner experience makes it possible for me to get up at 6:30 in the morning, work my backside off (or at least try to) all day, and stick to The Oaks eating plan.

My most recent sweet reward was The Ultimate Massage Collection, a 75-minute sampler of The Oaks' popular massages including the Swedish, hot river rock,



Hot mineral pools at Two Bunch Palms