

# Arizona Spas: A Healing Journey in the Desert

By [Beverly Mann](#) | March 25, 2012 | Last Updated: May 15, 2012 4:06 pm





The Boulders, a signature resort and spa, in the dramatic setting of the Sonoran Desert in Carefree, Arizona. (Courtesy of The Boulders Resort)

In deep thought, I gingerly placed one foot at a time on the spiral floor pattern. I was “walking” a labyrinth in view of 12-million-year-old granite boulders, towering saguaros, and prickly pear cacti—all brightened by the crystal, azure sky.

I had arrived at the spectacular Boulders Resort sculpted in the dry, dramatic landscape of the Sonoran Desert in Carefree, Ariz., near Scottsdale.

My personal mission was to achieve peace, relaxation, and a sense of mindfulness during a week of spa treatments, nature hikes, yoga classes, and an indulgence in wholesome and organic cuisine to feed my body and soul. The Boulders was one of three resorts where I was nurtured in nature and natural herbal treatments.

### **First Path to Wellness**

The Boulder’s Golden Door Spa, the oldest, continuously operating, destination spa in the U.S., is an architectural masterpiece with a circular, glass-encased tearoom in full view of the mountain-scape.

Sounds of waterfalls flowing by the neighboring pool and soft music added to the tranquil atmosphere. The spa’s café offers some reasonably priced, wholesome sandwiches and smoothies.

Connected to the 33,000-square-foot spa are a 2,000-square-foot fitness center and a thriving organic garden. I noticed a teepee where group shamanic classes are held periodically to further enhance the mental, spiritual, and emotional healing experiences.

My spa treatment consisted of a vitamin C facial. Esthetician Brandi, a woman with flawless ivory skin, skillfully massaged and exfoliated my neck and face, preparing it with antioxidant properties. My skin was definitely a-glow afterward.

During the afternoon, my partner and I headed for a 20-minute drive toward Pinnacle Peak Park for a 3.5-mile hike through an undulating hillside trimmed with giant saguaros and a wide variety of succulents and snakes (which luckily I didn’t encounter). Some 150 species of flora overlook the breathtaking views of the city below.

Cave Creek Regional Park is just 15 minutes from The Boulders and well worth a trip north along Carefree Highway. This 2,922-acre park, a site of a miner’s exploration and development some 120 years ago, has lots of hiking

choices.

We trekked just shy of 3,000 feet up on the Go John Trail, a scenic switchback of approximately six miles that took two and a half hours. The weather during December was glorious—cool, crisp, clear, and sunny. At times, I felt I was traipsing on another planet, as I eyed the endless, gray, and craggy terrain.



The labyrinth at The Boulders. (Beverly Mann)



The Sanctuary's infinity pool, reminiscent of a Hollywood set. (Courtesy of The Sanctuary Resort & Spa)

### **Tantalizing Treats and Treatments**

Smack in the heart of new Scottsdale sits the Westin Kierland Resort & Spa where the service, Agave Spa treatments, and food were well orchestrated. This holistic haven is conveniently located near shopping and restaurants.

Even the breakfast at The Westin is memorable and a great boost for the day. I savored a fresh fruit smoothie, one of the many super foods honored by the hotel. The pecan and blueberry pancakes and lean, crisp bacon were quite

tasty. The hotel's brand is promoting a healthy stay. A treadmill may even be brought to your room by request.

The Brittlebush Bar & Grill near the golf course is yet another dining favorite. It has a Scottish-influenced menu featuring organic, sustainable produce. The slider sampler of buffalo, lamb, and Angus meat and the Short Rib Loaded Yorkshire Pudding were more than ample serving sizes to fill my appetite and even be shared.

However, our dinner at the Four-Diamond AAA Deseo Restaurant at the Westin Kierland was hard to surpass and probably one of my best dining experiences in Arizona. Award-winning Chef Douglas Rodriguez has developed a Nuevo Latino cuisine that tempts the palate as well as the eyes.

Only the freshest, seasonal ingredients, including local organic fish, are used and delicately seasoned with garden fresh herbs—enough to salvage the essence of each food flavor.

The outrageously delectable Millionaire Tacos, artistically presented with lobster, tuna, and Japanese hamachi, dissolved in my mouth. The ceviche appetizers are the house signature dishes.

I tried the Mixto Classico married in a medley of lobster, shrimp, scallops, calamari, octopus, and crab. The extra-tender churrasco-style beef tenderloin and Peruvian potatoes and crab were top choices for dinner.

Rated by Wine Spectator as one of the top 100 wine restaurants in Arizona, Deseo has an extensive wine list with impressive selections from South American to Latin American countries.

The colorful ambiance is further punctuated by resident and noted Cuban artist Nelson Garcia-Miranda's bold, vibrant, abstract paintings. Guests can personally meet the artist at work during their dining experience.

Eating was balanced with playing some tennis and a relaxing Hatha Yoga class at the Agave Spa. For golfers, there is an extensive daily fitness class.

The 15,000-square-foot spa has 20 treatment rooms and utilizes the indigenous agave and desert plants within the ancient herbal treatments for healing and nurturing. My daylong stay here started with an Oxygen Opulence Brightening Infusion Facial, popular with Hollywood stars, which created a visible change in my skin.

My Wellness Massage was geared to support, nourish, and balance my body and mind. After the Flower Essence Pedicure, I was complete from head to toe. A side note: Agave Spa donates 10 percent of its proceeds to the Fresh Start Women's Foundation, a self-help center in Phoenix for women.

A surprising wellness treat was the Seasonal Eating Class given each Saturday at the Agave Spa by trainer Michelle Rusinko. We tasted—and even walked away with the recipes—fresh kale and quinoa salads, along with a nourishing squash soup, all prepared in minutes. Michelle gave me a myriad of tips on nutrition and ayurvedic (science of life) eating.



Resident artist Nelson Garcia-Miranda at work at the Westin Kierland Resort & Spa. (Beverly Mann)

Another holistic approach to cooking is at the True Food Kitchen, centered just opposite the resort in the Scottsdale Quarter. This vegetarian restaurant touted globally inspired cuisine, which was created in partnership with Dr. Andrew Weil. The shopping center wasn't that crowded the day I arrived, but the restaurant was packed mid-week.

My friend and I enjoyed their healthful antioxidant and immune-boosting blast juices. The pan-seared sea bass was a tasteful choice, topped by an apple and pear crisp loaded with diced fruit, which I finished off with coconut whipped cream. The ginger cookie ice cream was also a winner.

During my last night at the Westin, I relaxed at the open hearth with a glass of wine. As the sun set, Scottish Bagpipes further soothed my senses. It was nice seeing friends and families gather around the fire pit, adding a ceremonial feel to the scene.

## A Peaceful Sanctuary

My final stop for health and healing was a two-night stay at the stunning Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain, where East meets West in décor and cuisine. Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, the luxurious resort is nestled on the northern slope of the mountainside with a birds-eye view of the Praying Monk Mountain.

Everything had an Asian and zen feel, like the 12,000-square-foot Satori Spa (the Japanese name means enlightenment), movement classes of moonlight yoga and sunrise Pilates, and a dramatic infinity pool reminiscent of a Hollywood movie set when illuminated at night.

A popular resort for celebrities from Jamie Foxx and Halle Berry to Angelina Jolie, the Sanctuary is more like a retreat created to celebrate the symphony of four natural elements: earth, air, water, and fire.

Water dominates the spa area with a reflecting pond and an adjacent Zen Meditation garden, a private Watsu pool, and the Sanctum, an outdoor treatment room made more soothing by the sounds of water. I had a therapeutic Swedish massage by Gary, who customized my treatment according to some existing injuries.

The Elements Restaurant provided a definitive dining experience. While in a glass-encased venue with spectacular views of the Praying Monk Mountain, I savored fresh, quality, and creatively prepared dishes.

The cauliflower and lobster bisque soup and escargot and mushroom pie appetizer (with savory sweetness under a delicate pastry shell) had flavors that excited the palate and were a meal in itself.

The restaurant is noted for its signature cocktails blended with the freshest juices, herbs, and veggies: Grapefruit Basil with Absolut—citron, basil, and grapefruit—and the Dragon's Tonic, an unusual blend of Bombay Sapphire (gin), blueberry, lemon, tarragon, and tonic.

Their magical mixologist demonstrates these creations at 1:00 p.m. every Saturday with a tasting and recipes provided.

Most memorable was my evening stroll to the nearby Franciscan Renewal Center. It was there that I walked once again through a labyrinth enveloped by the granite mountains.

Except this time, the evening stars were illuminating the darkness as I meditated on the music of silence and tranquility encompassing me, ever so grateful for my week's healing journey in the desert landscape.

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