

## Couples Choice Spa: The Spa Villas at the Vista Spa

by Sara Varney, PassPorter Guest Contributor

With our 10th wedding anniversary approaching, followed closely by the MouseFest Cruise on the Disney Wonder, I decided it was time to convince my husband, Shawn, that there is more to the Disney Cruise Line's Vista Spa than the Rainforest Room. (Even getting Shawn as far as the Rainforest Room on our previous cruise had been a task -- three days of convincing followed by the typical male response, "This is great! Why didn't you tell me about this sooner? I would have been here every day!") Sigh ...

So it was with great deliberation that I began my plan of attack. Leave copy of PassPorter's Field Guide to the Disney Cruise Line lying around the house -- check. Return from day at local spa and mention how romantic it would be to have a spa treatment together -- check. Leave web site with photos of new Spa Villas up on screen on laptop -- check! Needless to say, all of these hints went unnoticed. However, when I finally broke down and told him clearly how much I would like to do this with him, he was in.

We explored the options available in the Spa Villas for Two. (There are also Spa Villas for One which I will cover later.) All Spa Villa treatments include time in the hot tub on the spa villa's private verandah, a foot cleansing ritual, and a tea ceremony. There is the Romantic Retreat, which includes a 50-minute spa treatment of your choice (choose from the La Therapie HydraLift Facial, an Elemis Pro-Collagen Marine Facial, an Elemis Deep Tissue Muscle Massage, a Swedish Massage or an Elemis Exotic Lime & Ginger Salt Glow with half-body massage), at \$449. The total time allotted for the Retreat is 120 minutes, so you have plenty of time before and after the selected treatment to enjoy the verandah. Next is the Couples Choice, which includes a 75-minute spa treatment of your choice and costs \$475. There are more options here; the Elemis Aroma Stone Therapy, an Elemis Cellutox Aroma Spa Ocean Wrap, an Elemis Musclease Aroma Spa Ocean Wrap, an Exotic Lime & Ginger Salt Glow with half-body massage, an Exotic Frangipani Body Nourish Wrap with half-body massage or an Exotic Coconut Rub & Milk Ritual Wrap with half-body massage). The Couples Choice lasts 130 minutes. Finally there is the Ultimate Indulgence, which is the longest option and gives you the most free time out on the verandah, with the total time coming in at 150 minutes. The Ultimate Indulgence includes an Elemis Pro-Collagen Marine Facial followed by an Elemis Deep Tissue Muscle Massage and costs \$589.

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Our choice was clear. Shawn wanted the Elemis Aroma Stone Therapy so it was the Couples Choice for us! As Castaway Club members, we had the option of booking our spa treatments on the Disney Cruise Line web site 90 days in advance of our cruise. (Please note that only the following treatments are available to book online: Alone Time (described below) and Couples Choice. All other treatments must be booked onboard.) We knew we wanted to book our Spa Villa for our day at sea (not wanting to enjoy our verandah while docked next to the Carnival Cruise ships in Nassau or lose any time on Castaway Cay) and with limited spots available per day in each Villa, these appointments go quickly. I was successful and was able to book our appointment for 2:30 pm on Wednesday, December 5.

The months flew by and seemingly the next thing I knew we were en route to Port Canaveral and catching that magical glimpse of the Disney Wonder as we crossed the bridge to the Port. We enjoyed every moment of our cruise - exploring Atlantis in Nassau, snorkeling at Castaway Cay while our son enjoyed Scuttle's Cove, brunch at Palo with friends... Finally it was time! We left our son in the capable hands of his grandparents, changed into our bathing suits and headed to Deck 9 aft where the Vista Spa is located.

We were greeted at the desk by Lerissa, who gave us our locker keys and paperwork to fill out. Shawn was a little startled by the length of the medical forms but after assuring him that no, no blood samples would be required, we headed first to our separate locker rooms to grab robes and then to the Rainforest Room to await our turn. After a few minutes in the steam room for him and the sauna for me, we were greeted by the lovely Claudia and Sarah who led us to our Spa Villa.

When you first enter the Villa, the first things you notice are the side-by-side massage tables. Then your eye immediately goes to the wall-to-wall sliding glass windows that lead out onto a huge verandah. But before you are allowed out onto the verandah, you must first choose which treatments you will be getting. Shawn was clear that he was having the Aroma Stone Therapy and after consulting with Claudia, I decided on that as well. (I was tempted by the Exotic Lime & Ginger Salt Glow with half body massage but Claudia explained that if I was looking for relaxation, then the Stone Therapy was the way to go!) We were then led out onto the verandah and asked to sit on the large teak day bed. Our feet were placed in shallow, gold colored bowls held on Claudia and Sarah's laps and then scrubbed with an exfoliating wash and rinsed. (It was at this point that Shawn began to look slightly uncomfortable prompting Claudia to ask if we had been to the Spa before. I explained that while I was a "Spa Vet", Shawn was a "Spa Newbie." Claudia teased him gently about his "first pedicure" and Shawn appeared to relax.)

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Then Claudia explained that they would now go set up the Spa Villa for us. While they were doing that, we should remove our robes, leave on our bathing suits and enjoy the hot tub. She explained that they would tap on the glass to let us know when our time was almost up and then, at our leisure, we should begin to exit the hot tub, remove our bathing suits and hang them over the edge of the tub to dry, put on our robes, then join them inside. She was very clear that at no time should we feel rushed or hurried. She inquired as to our comfort level with the temperature and wind as she could adjust the glass walls on the verandah to our preferences. We opted for the windows wide open as it was a beautiful day. Claudia and Sarah excused themselves, shut the glass doors to the Villa, and discreetly closed the blinds.

Shawn and I luxuriated in the hot tub for about 15 minutes, enjoying the contrast between the warm water and the cool breeze. After a while, we began to notice that the breeze was growing ever cooler and our exposed parts were getting chilly! So we hopped out of the tub, into our robes and headed into the Villa where Claudia and Sarah were finishing their preparations. They looked a little startled to see us so soon but recovered nicely and finished their preparations quickly. They said they'd step out for a moment so we could disrobe and slide under the covers, face down. We waved good-bye to each other, complied, and waited for their return.

Claudia and Sarah re-entered and our treatments began. Ahhhh -- heaven! 75 minutes of soothing warmth and massage. This was, hands down (pun intended), the best massage I have ever had. At least the part I remembered as I fell sound asleep until they asked me to turn over! Shawn swears that he did not sleep but I (and Claudia, his masseuse) beg to disagree. Either way, when the massages were over, we were both exquisitely relaxed. Claudia and Sarah stepped out so that we could don robes, then escorted us back out to the verandah where Shawn and I tucked ourselves in to the gorgeous day bed. Propped up on pillows, we were offered our choice of tea. (We both chose Orange.) Along with our tea, we were served a beautiful plate of fruit. We enjoyed our snack and promptly dozed off again under the comfort of the blankets, listening to the sound of the waves.

All too soon, the tap-tap-tap sounded on the glass and we rose to rejoin the rest of the world. Claudia and Sarah inquired as to our enjoyment and level of relaxation and we assured them that we felt fabulous. We were presented the bill and left to sign for it while they waited outside. We were then escorted back to the locker rooms and bid farewell.

At every point during our experience, we were treated with the utmost respect and discretion. I cannot say enough about the level of service

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and skill of the technicians. While the experience was definitely an indulgence (coming in at almost \$600 including treatment and gratuity), the Couples Choice was worth every penny and then some. It felt like a once in a lifetime experience but I fervently hope that we do get to visit the Spa Villas again on our next cruise! And since Shawn enjoyed it as much as I did, it is a distinct possibility.

Other treatments can be booked for the Spa Villas, and champagne and strawberries are available for order as well. Contact the Vista Spa about customizing your Spa Villa experience. The Spa Villa for One treatment choices are: Alone Time -- a 50-minute spa treatment (choose from: La Therapie HydraLift Facial, an Elemis Pro-Collagen Marine Facial, an Elemis Deep Tissue Muscle Massage, a Swedish Massage, an Elemis Exotic Lime & Ginger Salt Glow with half-body massage, or the Ionithermie Cellulite Reduction Program), which costs \$199 and has a total time of 105 minutes. Body Purifying -- A 100-minute body wrap (choose from: Elemis Cellutox Aroma Spa Ocean Wrap, an Elemis Musclease Aroma Spa Ocean Wrap, an Elemis Exotic Coconut & Milk Ritual, or an Elemis Exotic Frangipani Body Nourish Wrap) and full body massage. The total time is 155 minutes and this option costs \$245. The last option is Sensory Awakening, which is the same as the Ultimate Indulgence described above. The Sensory Awakening lasts 155 minutes and costs \$295.)

*About The Author: Sara lives in New England with her husband Shawn and their three year old son, Ryan. She wears multiple hats at PassPorter as PassPorter's Club Goddess, PassPorter Online Coordinator and PassPorter News Editor.*

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