



WINTER IN SWITZERLAND

The perfect place for taking the “Kur,” a spa holiday that refreshes mind, body and spirit

By **Becca Hensley**

In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau wrote about the power of lakes. He called them the “earth’s eye,” and said that looking into them helped the beholder “measure the depth of his own nature.”

That happens at Castello del Sole on Maggiore, a spa hotel on the shore of Lake Maggiore, where I’ve come for quietude.

Occupying abundant acres that include a vineyard, farm, orchard, garden and historic buildings, the hotel brings the terroir to play not only in its Michelin-starred restaurant, but in its spa, as well. Here, I partake of a hydrating facial, which includes both scrub and mask, products made from the grapes that grow here. And I also find contentment in nature, swimming in glassy water, taking long walks through the vineyard and farm, and sitting in a wicker chair, book in hand, in the orchard that overlooks the lake.

I ponder, and feel a relaxing contentment take over. Some places take you to stillness faster than others. Switzerland, with its mirror-like lakes, chunky mountains, hot springs, wild-flower-flecked meadows and impossibly blue skies manages that better than most.

Long a refuge for wellness travelers, this tiny nation became a top destination for British tourists in the 19th century. They came in hopes that fresh air and an active, outdoor lifestyle would relieve the lung disease (and lethargy) they’d contracted in their polluted cities back home. The Swiss, inimitable hosts, opened upscale hotels, where they offered local treatments

from whey rubdowns to mulch baths, from herbal elixirs to marmot oil massages. They also urged guests to immerse in exercise, homegrown food and creative pursuits. Visitors, who noted visible improvements in their health, stayed for months, vowing to return year after year.

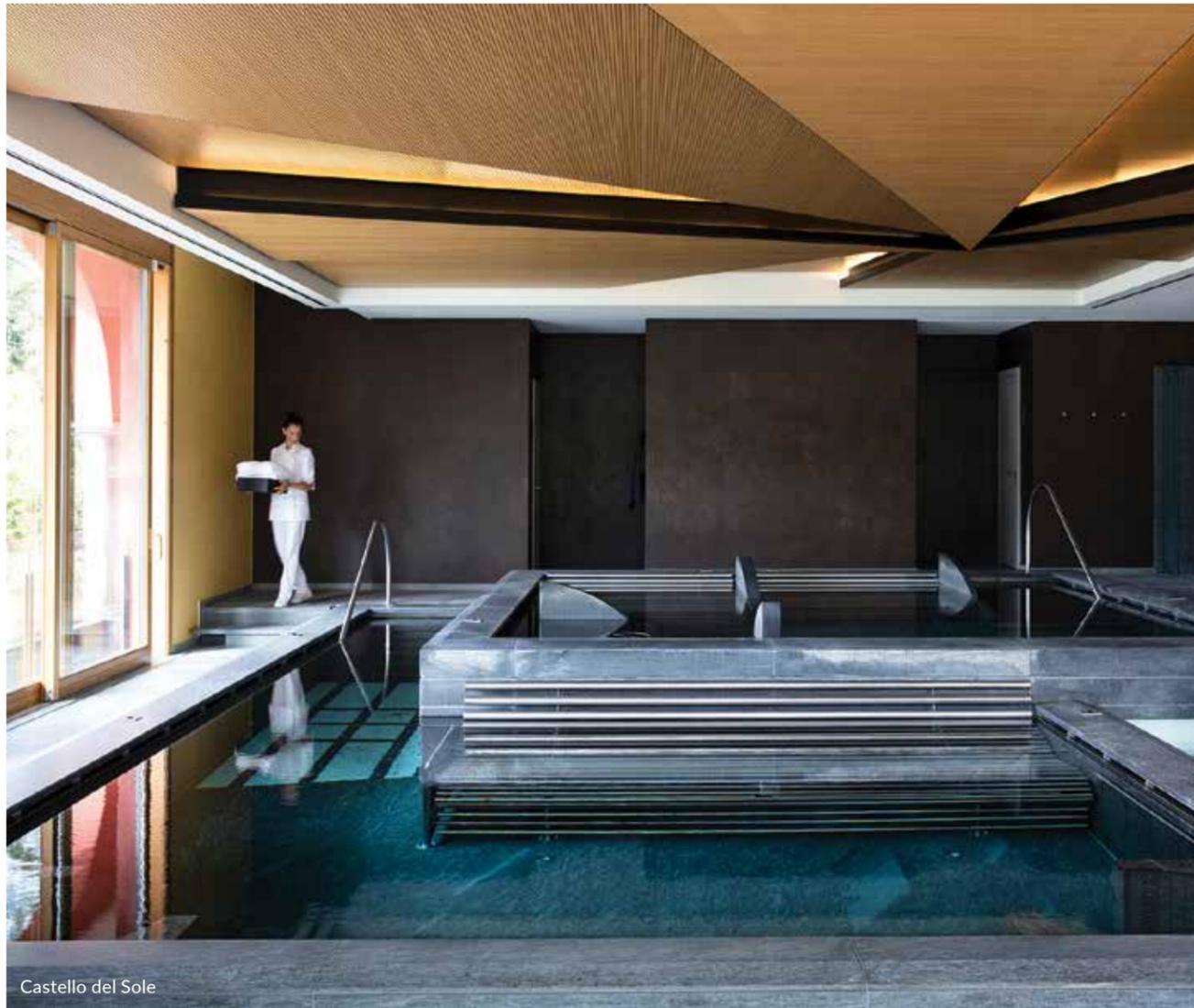
Taking a restorative vacation in Switzerland has historical precedence. The concept of the “Kur,” a spa holiday meant to refresh the mind, body and spirit, is deeply rooted in central Europe. Its foundations may date back generations—perhaps to the Romans, who long knew the value of soaking in mineral waters. Proponents of wellness repose, such as German priest, Sebastian Kneipp, a 19th-century health pioneer, and Swiss doctor Maximilian Bircher-Benner of muesli fame, played a role, as well, with their teachings on salubrity promoting wellness, and making it part of the Swiss—and Central European—vernacular.

Today, the spa concept in Switzerland is as well-honed as their famous white-gloved hotels. Drawing philosophically from the past, but tweaking it with modern twists and technological advances, Swiss spas still allow nature and region to dictate their offerings. Yet, Swiss ingenuity and design keep

products, treatments and facilities modern and a la mode. Many spas occupy inspirational hotels, “houses” (as the Europeans call them), that support a quest for wellness with luxurious amenities, healthy local food, and top-notch facilities. Each interprets the concept of the “kur” their way. Here are five restorative escapes that do the job right.

☀️ **PARK HOTEL VITZNAU, VITZNAU**

Like a fairy tale retold, the imaginative reinterpretation of this grand dame took place five years ago, turning a classic, much-beloved, resort hotel into one of the world’s most fanciful hideaways. Still showing its old-school, castle-like architecture on the outside, Park Hotel Vitznau, a beacon on Lake Lucerne, reduced its number of rooms to make bigger ones. Now, it has just 47 suites, all voluminous, each distinctively brandishing a separate theme. A bi-level spa ensures the hotel lives up to its self-professed moniker as a “health and wealth residence.” Swim in the elongated infinity pool, which flows to the lake, edged by a sauna zone complete with a hydrotherapy area, two varieties of sauna, ice grotto and Kneipp foot baths. parkhotel-vitznau.ch/en



Castello del Sole

☀ **CASTELLO DEL SOLE, ASCONA**

In Italian-speaking Ascona, Switzerland's lowest lying town, Castello del Sole, occupies a large swathe of land on the lake. With a farm, garden, orchards and a vineyard, it grows myriad varieties of grapes, tea, corn, various vegetables and fruit, herbs, flowers and Loto, a kind of risotto. It also has a WWF bird sanctuary, a farm-to-fork Michelin-starred restaurant and a winery. Castello SPA & Beauty, fueled by the land's bounty, enriched with stellar yoga classes and a Kneipp water course, follows the hotel's lead to offer guests an earthy haven, with healing house-made creams, scrubs and elixirs. Take a walk along the lake to discover charming Ascona, the Positano of Switzerland. castellodelsole.com/en



Beekeeping on the roof at Schweizerhof Hotel & Spa



The Chedi Andermatt

☀ **GRAND RESORT BAD RAGAZ, BAD RAGAZ**

For readers of Johanna Spyri's novel, *Heidi*, which takes place in the mountain meadows surrounding Bad Ragaz, a visit to this idyllic spa town might be a cure in itself. On the fringes of the Pizol Mountains, encompassing meadows full of goats and wildflowers, rustic mountain huts and cranky "grandpa"-like hikers with walking sticks, Bad Ragaz has welcomed the infirm to its healing waters since medieval times. The resort complex, comprising two interconnected hotels, a medical clinic, parkland, myriad restaurants, pools and a spa, draws thousands in search of healing and relaxation.

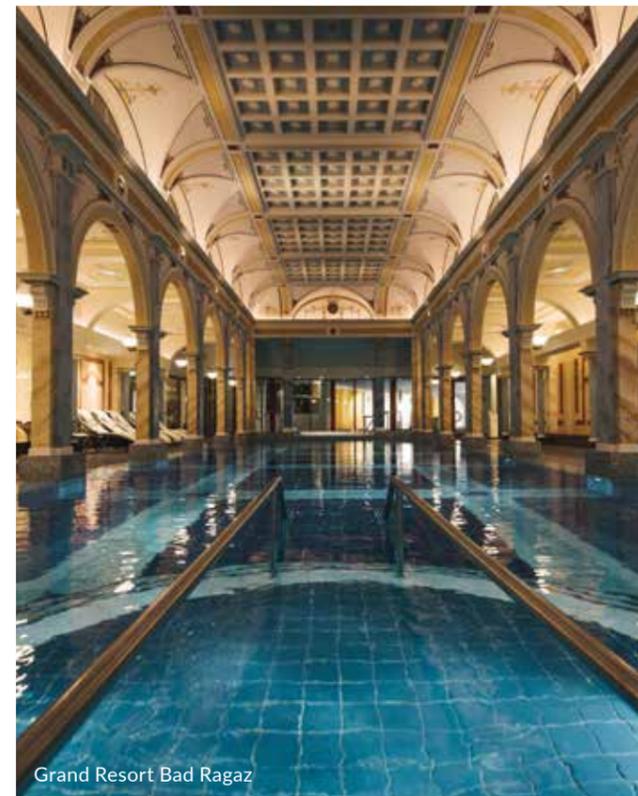
Burrow into the spa suites at Grand Hotel Quellenhof, where contemporary lairs feature personal saunas, steam rooms and whirlpools, all with a private supply of thermal-spa water, pumped straight from the renowned Tamina Gorge. When not soaking up mineral cures, yield to the spa's regional treatments, like the Sequoia Ceremony, a ritual where herbal sachets (filled with mallow, birch, marigold and sage) take massage to another level. resortragaz.ch/en

☀ **THE CHEDI ANDERMATT, ANDERMATT**

Once a 19th-century hot spot for spa travelers from the United Kingdom, Andermatt went through austere times when modern tunnels redirected traffic away from the unpretentious village. A location known for its crystal mining and an off-piste ski area legendary for its sheers, Andermatt experienced a renaissance when an Egyptian developer became entranced with the region, and built The Chedi. An oversized, Asia-meets-Alps retreat, elegant and otherworldly, this hotel has a swanky, womb-like vibe. Its centerpiece surely is the 7,900-square-foot spa, a labyrinthine sanctum, with winding paths, a 35-meter lap pool (enclosed in glass walls and visible from the lobby bar), a hydrotherapy area and state-of-the-art fitness room. thechedianderstatt.com/en

☀ **SCHWEIZERHOF HOTEL & SPA, BERN**

Sometimes you need to find your peaceful place in the middle of a city. In medieval Bern, the capital city of Switzerland, home to the Renzo Piano-designed Klee Museum, the contemporary shelter of sleek, refurbished Hotel Schweizerhof takes the edge off. It's the ideal place to hide for a while from the crowds. Have tea in the lobby bar, or Prosecco on the Sky Terrace, with 360-degree views of the cityscape. But, to truly unravel, save time for the 5,300-square-foot spa, a citified oasis. With bubbling waterbeds and a hydrotherapy pool, a Finnish sauna and experience showers, the spa's menu includes the Sky Deluxe Honey ritual, a fascia-focused massage, discharged with honey collected from the hotel's own rooftop hives. schweizerhof-bern.ch/en



Grand Resort Bad Ragaz