



Contents/Home

TRAVEL » SPAS

Jet Set Arts

- Movies
- DVDs
- Music
- TV
- Books
- Fine Arts

Jet Set Life

- Parties
- Celebrities
- Restaurants
- Hot Spots
- Wine
- Spirits

Jet Set Style

- Fashion
- Beauty
- Salons
- Fitness
- Design
- Architecture

Jet Set Travel

- Destinations
- Spas
- Adventure
- Islands
- Voluntourism
- Vehicles

Jet Set Jen's Blog

Jet Set Jack

- A Dog's Life

About Us

Contact Us

Links

Spa: The Oaks at Ojai

By Pauline Adamek

Located just 80 or so miles and a brief drive's north of Los Angeles, The Oaks at Ojai Health Spa is the perfect getaway for anyone seeking a healthy vacation or hoping to kick-start a new exercise and diet routine.

Founded in 1977 by internationally renowned fitness pioneer Shelia Cluff, The Oaks at Ojai is one of the original American destination spas. Offering an all-inclusive stay, visitors commit to a 1200-calorie-a-day eating plan and can choose from up to sixteen different fitness activities daily, each with a varying degree of challenge.

Rather than a luxury spa for the elite and pampered, The Oaks at Ojai feels more like a working-women's retreat. Men are welcome but tend to be

outnumbered by women who are seeking an escape from their busy lives or the opportunity to bond with their daughters, mothers, sisters, and friends. The rooms and spacious suites are well appointed and comfortable. Best of all, being served your carefully constructed and deliciously balanced meals, rather than selecting from a buffet, eliminates the stress of choice and the temptation to overeat. No alcohol is available, though several wineries are nearby.



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The Oaks at Ojai Destination Spa.

Fitness classes are assigned categories such as “cardio,” “strength training,” or “flexibility” and can be as tough as the “Cardio Step,” “Pilates Mat,” or “Core and More,” or as gentle as the late afternoon “Relax, Stretch, and Yoga,” a mellow class that helps you learn how to reintroduce flexibility to untrained or dormant muscles. Led by women of various ages and sizes, the instructors can be truly inspirational.

Also on offer are evening programs and lectures on topics as varied as “How to Write Your Own Autobiography” and “The Obesity Epidemic: What Are the ‘Fats?’” to craft workshops such as a hands-on demonstration of the delightful Japanese art of paper folding and dyeing known as Shibori.

For those seeking the opportunity to unwind after awakening and working their body, the spa facilities are all there. The large outdoor pool, with its azure waters, entices you to swim, lounge around, or participate in various aqua-tone and water-based aerobic classes. There are two whirlpool hot tubs (one indoor, one out), a wet steam room, and a dry sauna. The spa sanctuary is reserved for women until the evening, when it becomes co-ed. A range of gym equipment is also available for spontaneous use.

Though situated right in the heart of quaint Ojai, you feel worlds away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. The grounds of this modest spa are grassy and pleasant and a brisk twenty-minute walk brings you to some hiking trails that offer spectacular views of the valley and nearby ridge. Rounding the bend during one of their guided 90-minute early morning hikes presents



A morning hike at the Oaks at Ojai.

you with a breathtaking view that could be straight out of a Tolkien novel.

Massages, wraps, facials, and wellness services are also offered, as well as manicures, pedicures, makeup session, and hair styling to have you looking your best after a workout. One superb treatment on the spa menu is the Ultimate Massage Collection (75 minutes, \$135), offering you a taste of all six of their massage techniques, including Hot River Rock, their signature Massage.com, Swedish, Reflexology, Aromatherapy, and Thai Table.

The Ojai Olive Oil Body Soufflé (75 minutes, \$130) is a decadent treatment. It also starts with a thorough exfoliating salt scrub, after which you are hand-rinsed, then a fluffy concoction of local olive oil is slathered all over. During the cocoon-like sheet wrap, you enjoy a scalp and foot massage while the nutritious oils replenish your skin. This luxurious treatment concludes with another hand wash and application of moisturizer, leaving you feeling silky and smooth all over.



A spa treatment at the Oaks at Ojai.

Offering more “bang for your buck” than virtually any other spa in the States, The Oaks at Ojai prides themselves on being a value-oriented spa. Spa Fitness Packages offer discounts for those opting for a longer stay. The Healthy Jumpstart package is a seven-day program that includes accommodation, their low-fat spa cuisine meals (three per day, plus two snack breaks), access to any of the

daily activities and classes as well as your choice of two personal services such as massage or facials, all for as low as \$1323. The twelve-night package starts at \$2268 per person. A Mother-Daughter special is also occasionally offered.

High season is during the spring and summer, when visitors from all over the country head for the balmy weather and festivals in and around Ojai. But escaping colder climes may also be the draw during the fall and winter months.

The Oaks at Ojai is perfect for women wanting to kick start a healthy lifestyle as the experienced staff provide so many tools and techniques and assistance to do so.

In taking the time to focus every day to your own wellbeing, don't be surprised if you fall in love with this location and mark it a frequent escape destination on your calendar. Plenty do!

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