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Classic California Spa

The Oaks at Ojai provides a healthy, stress-free oasis

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The Oaks at Ojai (800-753-6257, www.oaksspa.com), a destination spa in Ojai, California, has a real sense of history and a unique feeling of place, two qualities that can't be manufactured. The Oaks at Ojai has been in operation for 30 years, on the site of Ojai's original hotel, built in 1922. While many spas of the new millennium favor spare, Zen-like design, The Oaks has a homey, rustic feel and zero pretension. Most spa statistics show a surge in spa visits by men; The Oaks flies in the face of change, maintaining a female guest ratio of 95 percent. "We don't market to men," says Cathy S. Cluff, managing director, The Oaks at Ojai. "A lot of our women guests like the relaxed setting without men being present." The average guest is a 40-plus female coming on her own or bringing a friend. Cluff notes that they see a lot of multi-generational guests, including mother-daughter pairings, especially in response to regularly scheduled Mother-Daughter Discounts in January, May and September.

"Our food plan gets the highest rating on our guest comments cards," says Cluff. "Our guests are looking for that controlled diet." The Oaks spa cuisine consists of 1,000 calories a day, with a concentration on fresh, local produce prepared without added salt or sugar.

Most of The Oaks' 46 rooms are standard rooms, which are also the most economical. Rates are based on occupancy. "We still do room-sharing at The Oaks," says Cluff. "Sharing a room and receiving double occupancy rates enables more people to come on their own."

Several years ago The Oaks introduced suites built and decorated in Mission Revival style, a style found

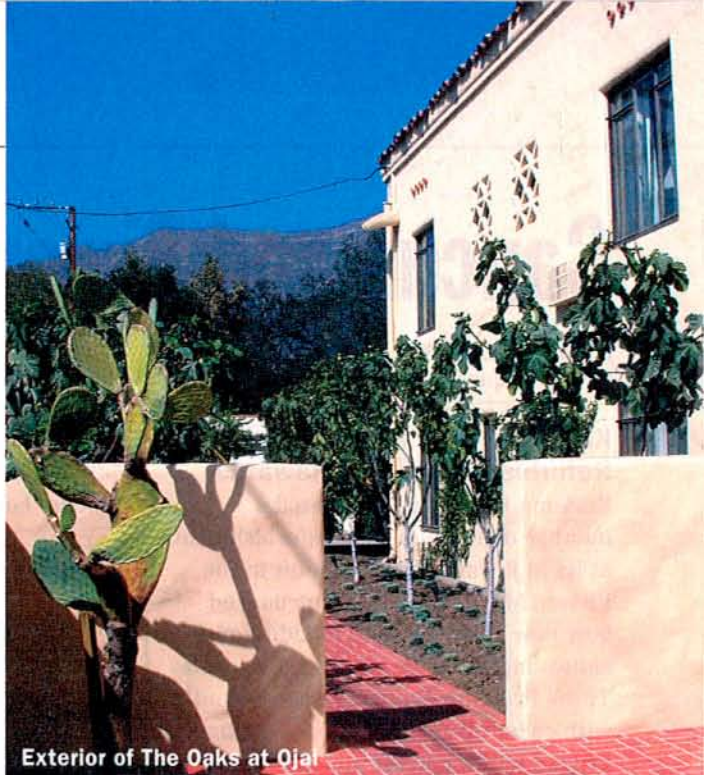
throughout the town of Ojai. Suites have proven to be popular, averaging 90 percent occupancy throughout the year. "Our introduction of suites was in response to guests saying to us, 'I love what you do, but I'm accustomed to more luxurious accommodations,'" says Cluff. Suites have handmade tiles, bathrooms accented with wrought-iron fixtures, jetted tubs, handcarved doors, headboards, vanities and closets made of distressed Alder wood. Wrought-iron lanterns accent the Mission Revival-style theme.

The property's two Courtyard Suites cover more than 600 square feet, double the size of any guest room the spa has offered in the past, and feature an additional 430 square feet of courtyard and patio space. Guests enter courtyards complete with fountain, hand-tinted Sautillo tile flooring, and a variety of plants native to California, including fruit trees such as orange, fig, kumquat and tangerine. The Oaks also has three Mini Spa Suites; these are 375 square feet, plus a 240-square-foot enclosed patio with fountain.

The Oaks also bucks the trend on advance spa appointments. "We've found that 50 percent of our guests would change their appointments once they arrived and saw the schedule of activities available to them," says Cluff. "We also experienced late arrivals missing out on their spa appointment." The signature treatment is the Ojai Olive Oil Body Souffle, which utilizes oil from locally grown olives. In this vein, The Oaks is developing a new treatment using locally grown oranges to create an orange body wrap.

Additional treatments include Ojai River Rock Massage, Swedish massage, watsu and acupuncture.

"Activities at The Oaks are consid-



Exterior of The Oaks at Ojai

ered an added value," says Elizabeth Horton, director of activities. "For example, an included activity might be a smoking cessation program representing a \$1,500 value." Activities include yoga, tai chi, qi gong sessions and exercise sessions in the pool. "I'm developing an Oaks Unplugged activity," says Horton. "It will utilize self-administered hand massage that helps people unwind from the physical stress from sitting at a computer all day or using their BlackBerry."

The Oaks is situated right on Ojai's main street. Cluff says that guests love the nearby shopping arcade, neighborhood art galleries and Bart's Books, an Ojai institution a few blocks away.

The market breaks down to 60 percent drive and 40 percent fly-in. The Oaks is about 90 minutes from the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). Cluff recommends agents book ahead three to four weeks. The Oaks pays travel agents 10 percent commission. The travel agent liaison for the property is Jackie Pahnke, reservations and group sales manager. She can be reached at jackie@oaksspa.com.

A stay at The Oaks starts at \$180 per person, per night, for a Standard Twin Double Lodge, and \$320 per person, per night, for a Mini Spa Suite. This includes overnight accommodations, three meals a day, choice of 16 fitness classes per day and evening entertainment and seminars. ■