

His and Hers: On the Course and in the Spa

Not so long ago, the idea of a golf and spa vacation appealed to couples in the ways you would expect: he wanted to wake up and head for the course, and she wanted a sea salt scrub followed by a Swedish massage. During the past few years, however, those gender stereotypes have undergone a decided transformation. As men become more comfortable within the rapidly expanding universe of spas, and as the number of female golfers continues to rise, you're just as likely to find a woman clamoring for the links and her husband asking for the masseuse.

The International Spa Association (ISPA) reports that men make up 36 percent of spa travelers. Recognizing that trend — and staying ahead of it — many resort spas offer a men's section with services like golf massages and gentlemen's facials. They're beginning, too, to make the entire spa experience more male-friendly. At the same time, the National Golf Foundation (NGF) reports that the number of women golfers in the U.S. has grown to 6.4 million, an eight percent growth since 2002. Put those figures together and you start to see a major shift in vacation planning.



“Where in the past we had females in groups [going to a spa], now we have couples going to spa destinations,” says Audrey Hulseley, a travel counselor with Pegasus Travel Center, an American Express representative agency in Omaha, Neb. “The men no longer want to be left out.”

His and Her Resorts

Hers: Resorts, for their part, are ready to receive female golfers. “I’m really seeing more women traveling with men to golf,” says Dan Smith, a partner with Crossroads Travel Advisors in Richmond, Va. Pam Swenson, CEO of the Executive Women’s Golf Association, agrees and adds, “Properties that understand and value women golfers will find a very loyal customer and will be ahead of the game.”

Destinations like Scotland, the Caribbean, Arizona, and Florida continue to attract golfing couples. According to the NGF, 48 percent of core female golfers took a golf trip in the past three years. (Core golfers are defined as those playing at least eight rounds per year; out of the 6.9 million female golfers in the United States, 2.5 million fall into the “core” category.)

“We’re seeing the number of women playing golf continue to climb,” says Arthur Berg, vice president of marketing for KSL Resorts, which owns spa and golf resort properties in California.

In the same way that female drivers have a reputation for stopping to ask for directions more readily than men, female golfers — anecdotally, at least — are more open to lessons and instruction.

“The sport is newer for them,” says Berg. “There’s less ego involved. They want to get taught and helped.” To that end, KSL Resorts and others are offering more lessons and a more genial atmosphere. “Our staff is more sensitized to fielding questions, and they’re making it clear to everyone who calls that it’s not just a men’s golf club,” Berg adds.

His: “Originally spas catered to women wanting to lose weight, but they’ve evolved into more of a health and wellness environment,” says Hulsey, who cites Europe as an emerging spa destination. That means more spa-goers are looking for relaxation and renewal — not pampering (think yoga for golfers and detoxifying thermal clay wraps). And increasing numbers of men are seeking this pampering.

A survey commissioned by KSL Resorts found that the majority of men experience a spa for the first time at a resort. Seventy-three percent of respondents (including those yet to try a spa) said they thought spa treatments were likely to reduce the stress of business travel.

“It’s not just that men are going more, but they’re wanting specific treatments just for them. They want the post-golf massage or the barber services, or facials that address their particular concerns,” says Susie Ellis, president of Spa Finder, a New York–based spa marketing and media company. “Men are more results oriented. They’re not just looking to get pampered — they want to decrease high blood pressure or relieve stress or improve their golf swing.”

The male market’s influence is playing out in ways big and small, Ellis says. When spas first became popular, the robes were made for women — the occasional male visitor was offered a woman’s large, which was usually too small. Now men’s spa robes are sized for them, with hoods to make them feel like boxers’ robes. Many resorts have given over equal space to men’s and women’s lounges, and redecorated both with gender-neutral decor.

“We’re now seeing men call and book spa vacations,” says Berg. “He’s booking his own treatments and he’s booking his wife’s — he has enough knowledge and comfort to do that because he’s experienced some of the treatments already himself.”



Real Estate and Amenities

As the demand for second homes continues to increase, real estate developers too are providing golf and spa amenities to satisfy both sides of a couple's equation. "The second-home market is becoming focused on amenities," says Libby. Spas and golf courses don't have to be on the property, he adds, "but they have to be accessible. That's true no matter where you go."

With retirement-age baby boomers focusing more and more on healthy living and wellness rather than the sedentary "golden years" of previous generations, the real estate industry is chanting the "lifestyle, lifestyle, lifestyle" mantra.

"We're seeing an effort in our communities to appeal to that active lifestyle," says Tony Macaluso, broker/owner of Portside Properties in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. That effort includes clubs in residential communities renovating to offer spa and gym amenities for both men and women.

"Increasingly," says Ellis, "the spa lifestyle community is attracting home buyers — men and women, golfers and nongolfers alike. We're definitely seeing a trend with properties that have a spa as a central part of the community," she says. "Spas are becoming what golf courses were 30 years ago" — not just an occasional attraction or a nice-to-have, but a must-have.

Today, according to the Dallas-based Golf Research Group (GRG), \$36 billion is spent on new residential houses on U.S. golf courses every year. According to the data by the National Association of Realtors, homes in the Las Vegas area located in private golf communities command 12.5 percent more on average than homes not located in golfing communities. "One thing I've seen in the last few years is that whenever you can get golf and spa together it's tremendously successful," says Colin Hegarty, the GRG's president.

In some high-end developments on Florida's Gulf Coast, for example, home ownership includes membership at the communities' club and spa facilities. Or a nearby resort may appeal to home buyers. At Starr Pass Country Club & Spa, in Arizona's Sonoran Desert, buyers can choose from custom sites or established residences — from townhouses to multimillion dollar luxury homes — and then choose from five different levels of membership in the nearby country club and spa. In California's South Palm Desert, the private community Bighorn added a multimillion dollar spa years ago and has seen its sales skyrocket. And as gender expectations meld, communities are taking a page from the resorts' books — catering to men at the spa and offering women golf leagues, lessons, and women-only days on some of the courses.

"We are seeing in our communities that as people are getting more involved with a facilitative lifestyle, it's less gender driven and more driven by health and a sense of self-fulfillment," says Henry DeLozier, vice president of golf for Pulte Homes, a builder with operations in 27 states. "Is it a sea change? No. But we have more women taking up golf and we have more men using the spa and fitness components in our communities." Responding to that trend, Pulte takes the needs and expectations of female golfers into account when designing communities. In one community in Phoenix, a women's putting group has

800 members; a similar group in Palm Springs has 500.



“Women really respond to a friendlier environment, from the person who takes their bags to the person who takes their money in the pro shop,” says Nancy Berkley, a women’s golf consultant based in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. “More golf courses are investing in that. And we know that women have a significant influence on the purchase of vacation homes on golf courses.” Hegarty agrees: “Usually when you look at the real estate decision process, the woman leads the decision. The golf industry is just waking up to that.”

On the spa side, DeLozier adds, “You see men more mindful of a commitment to physical fitness than they used to be.” And while spa treatments still attract mostly (though not exclusively) women, Pulte sites have witnessed an upsurge in men taking part in the community aspect of health and wellness — eschewing solitary exercise in favor of group classes, for example.

To be sure, neither resorts nor residential communities have yet reached the point where a man turns his back on the golf course in favor of the spa, or where the woman hangs up her robe for good. And experts say that day probably won’t arrive anytime soon, if ever. But with the market for resort vacations and second homes remaining strong, and with both the spa and the golf industries adapting to meet new demands, men and women are increasingly open-minded about how they spend their free time — and resorts and developers have no shortage of suggestions for them.

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