

Coachella Valley: Pamper yourself in a desert oasis

By JIM FARBER

INDIAN WELLS, Calif. There are so many reasons to choose the Coachella Valley as the destination for a perfect getaway vacation.

If pampering appeals to you, an ideal choice might be the Miramonte Resort and Spa. Nestled against the slopes of the Santa Rosa Mountains in Indian Wells, this Mediterranean viflastyle resort offers all the traditional amenities (restaurant, two swimming pools, cabanas, conference facilities, etc.) while maintaining a sense of intimacy. The grounds are impeccably landscaped with flowers and fruit trees, and restful hammocks are spotted strategically for an afternoon siesta. But it is the Miramonte's 14,000-square-foot, Tuscan-style spa, The Well, that is the resort's jewel. Enter, and you are in a world apart

The vast menu of massages, wraps, scrubs, baths and facials The Well offers (for her, him or both) range from the traditional to the exotic, from New Age meditative to the downright playful practice of "pittura festa" body painting with mud.

"With a palate of colorful muds and clays along with brushes," the spa's literature explains, "the therapist encourages guests to find their artistic side not to mention their inner child painting shades of red, green, yellow and black upon themselves and their partner."

I decided to pass on mud play in favor of a mud wrap. Here is how the brochure describes my treatment: "Our strongest blended mud containing oarweed algae. This treatment deeply stimulates circulation and the lymph system. Strong sensations of cold and progressive warmth occur as a state of balance is reached. The body is wrapped and attention is delivered through hands-on compression work followed by a milky massage oil. 60 minutes."

Followed by a nice, deep massage on the outdoor patio, a Polynesian-style flower petal and oil foot-washing ritual (accompanied by the ringing of Tibetan ting shaw bells) and a leisurely soak in The Well's glistening warm water pools, I had definitely achieved my goal for the day.

If you wish to combine luxuriant spa facilities with an even more romantic setting, it's hard to imagine a more perfect hideaway than one of the 19 Garden Villas that are part of the Hyatt Grand Champions Resort and Spa, also in Indian Wells.

The Hyatt is one of the region's large-scale luxury resorts, adjacent to a golf course of championship status. Though not as big as its Las Vegas counterparts, the Hyatt is nonetheless of a grand size, with 480 rooms.

The grounds abound with gently flowing streams and lakes. There are several swimming pools two for families and children, one (the most elegant) for adults only all surrounded by a veritable forest of palm trees.

But it is the Hyatt's 19 Garden Villas that set the resort apart. These single-story accommodations are an escape unto themselves. Sophisticated in their design and appointments, each villa features a large living room and dining area with plasma televisions and fireplaces.

The bathrooms are also spacious with a deep, sunken tub set about with blooming orchids. But the real delight is the private, walled-in garden with lounge chairs and its own hot tub, ideal for soaking together under the sun or stars.

Your villa's room key also admits you to the hotel's Regency. Club, where a lavish complimentary breakfast, midafternoon tea and wine tasting, and late-night desserts are served.

A short walk from your villa is the Hyatt's internationally acclaimed Aqua Serena Spa. With its cascading fountains, bubbling hot tubs, soft-water steam rooms and myriad treatments, it is one of the most beautiful to be found.

The Hyatt Grand Champions Resort and Spa has two large pools for families and children and an elegant adult-only pool, all surrounded by palm trees.