

HOME DINING RECREATION TRAVEL COMMUNITY HEALTH STYLE

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New Year
NEW YOU

Sand Between Your Toes

**TWO BEACHES, TWO DESERTS:
FOUR AMAZING SPA DESTINATIONS TO START 2016 OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT.**

BY MALLORY McCREARY

What does it take to achieve total relaxation in the much-too-brief time of a typical getaway? Could it be awesome natural beauty, inspiring architecture, world-class spa and wellness offerings, or a little bit of it all? The two desert and two beach destinations featured here beckon visitors to surrender to their stunning locations and top-tier services to emerge refreshed, relaxed, and feeling one step ahead of the sands of time.



Nizuc Resort & Spa Cancún, Mexico

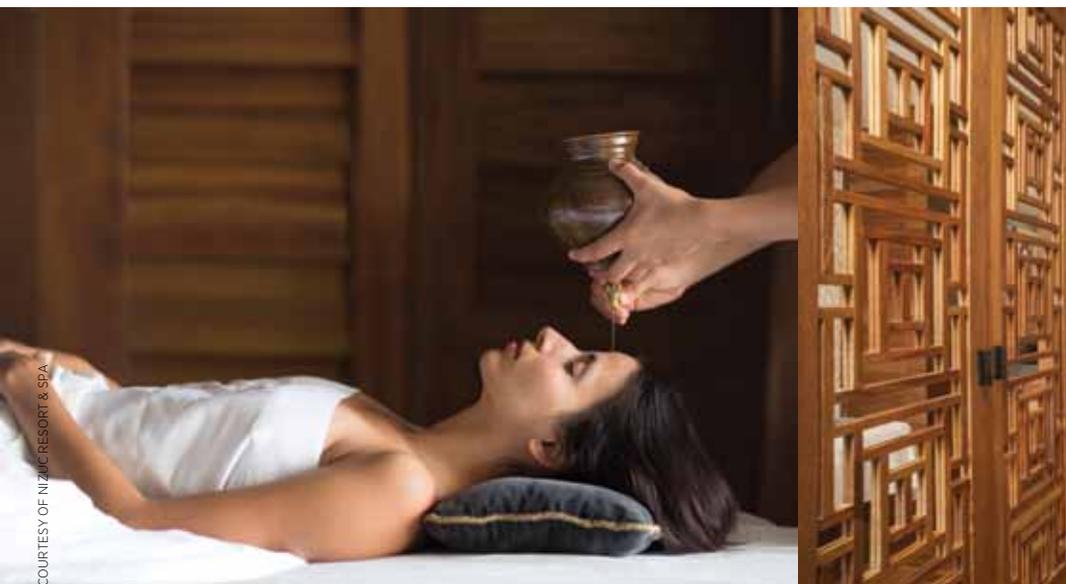
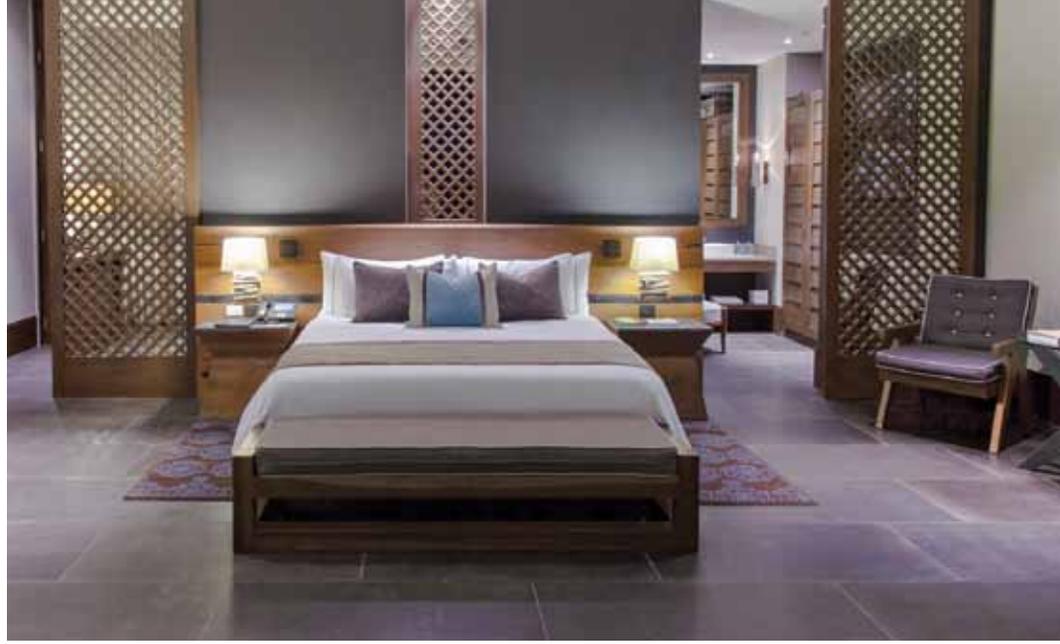
Cancún may seem more spring break than super bliss, but **Nizuc Resort & Spa** (nizuc.com), a two-year-old resort on 29 acres in a natural preserve, breaks the stereotype with a pristine location, sleek accommodations (rooms from \$544), and a world-class spa. The resort fronts the Mesoamerican Reef, which offers non-motorized recreation such as snorkeling, paddleboarding, and kayaking on crystal clear waters. Two private, pristine beaches (one for adults only), five swimming pools, and six restaurants create a self-contained atmosphere that make it entirely possible to never venture farther than the nearest lounge chair or the 30,000-square-foot indoor-outdoor spa.

ESPA is a famous name in spa design and products, and Nizuc has the only ESPA-branded spa in Mexico and the Caribbean. At Nizuc, two signature two-hour treatments combine healing practices from around the world with local influences. The “Nizuc Renewal” was inspired

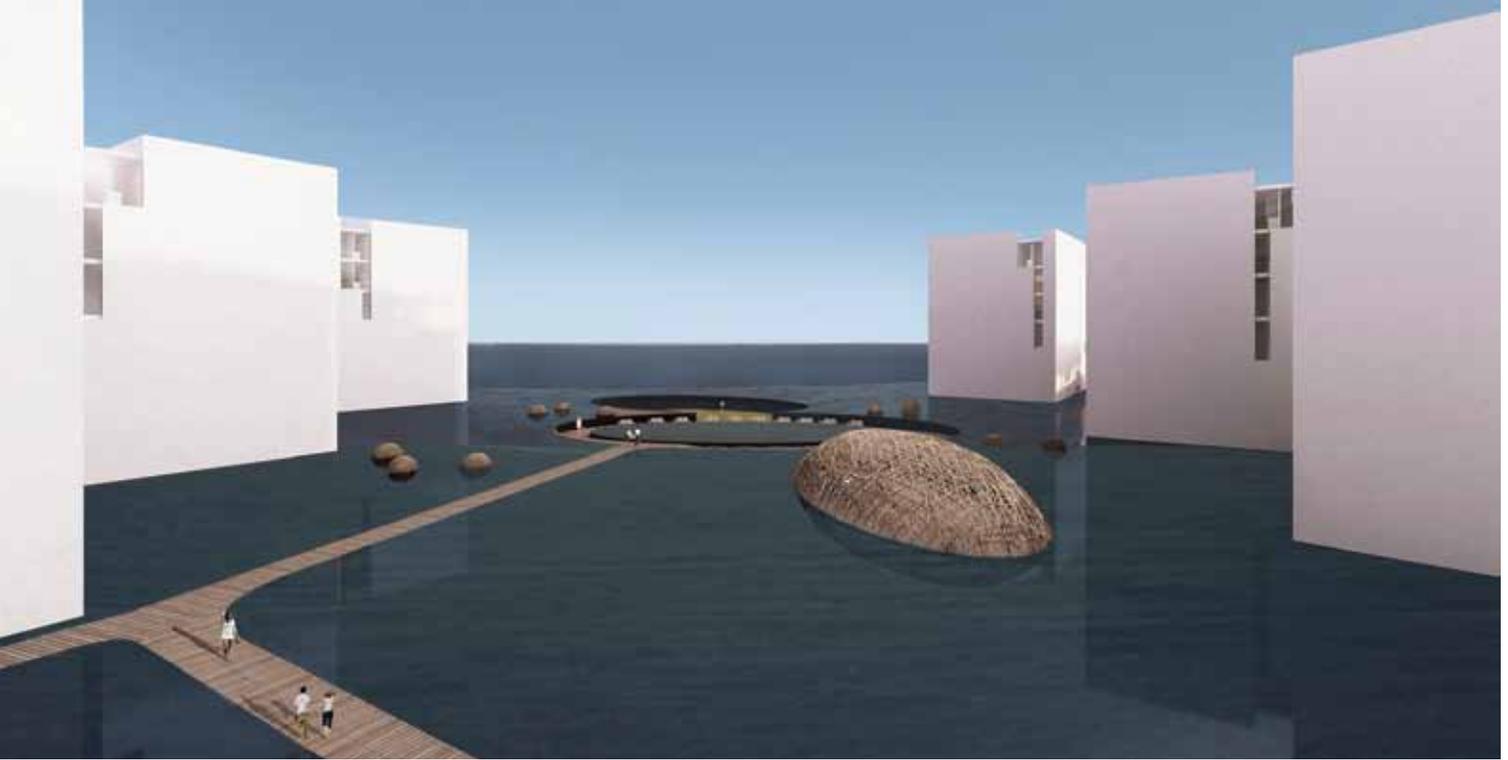
by the Mayans’ traditional use of healing stones and herbs. It starts with a body exfoliation and purification using sea salts and Mexican agave followed by a massage with warm gemstones, thought to have healing properties. The deep tissue “Mayan Cacao” massage uses cacao oil—celebrated by the Mayans for its mood-enhancing and restorative properties—followed by *shirodhara*, an ayurvedic practice where oil is poured on the forehead to calm the mind.

Several fitness classes are offered daily at the resort: salsa, yoga, cross-training, paddleboarding, total body conditioning, and meditation, to name a few. Two artificial-grass tennis courts are available for lessons or private play. And the restaurants include a global palette of casual beachside dining, contemporary Mexican, Asian-fusion, and Italian. All in all, Nizuc boasts a serene setting with as much—or as little—activity as necessary to achieve total relaxation.

At the oceanfront Nizuc Resort & Spa on the Yucatán Peninsula guests can take a dip and enjoy swim-up access to libations in the main pool, one of five, and lounge on secluded white-sand beaches. Décor throughout the resort takes inspiration from ancient Mayan culture. Among the relaxation-inducing spa treatments is *shirodhara*, an ayurvedic practice in which oil is poured on the forehead to calm the mind after a deep-tissue massage. Beachside dining offers sunset views.



COURTESY OF NIZJIC RESORT & SPA



Mar Adentro Hotel & Residences

San José del Cabo, Mexico

The clear sky, the bright sun, the never-ending ocean: These are the elements that Mexican architect Miguel Ángel Aragonés used as inspiration for **Mar Adentro Hotel & Residences** (maradentrocabos.com), a new luxury resort that opened in December.

Bright white buildings, minimalist design, and fascinating woven nest structures dot the property to create an environment that is both unusual and stunning in its simplicity. The self-taught architect and owner wanted to use the sea—*mar adentro* translates to “the sea within”—to great effect, with water as a central theme. The entire property seems to float on decorative pools; water canals connect buildings to create what Aragonés sees as an archipelago of structures. It’s designed to make guests feel like they are a part of the ocean and a part of the horizon, totally in tune with nature. It’s even situated so that all rooms (deluxe rooms, suites, penthouses, and villas from \$620 to \$2,850 per night) have ocean views. The look of the all-white palette, both indoors and out, changes throughout the day as light and shadow play on surfaces. At night, guests can choose from an in-room color lighting menu to create whatever mood is desired.

Water is also the driving inspiration at the on-site Mar Abierto spa (which was scheduled to open early January as of press time). Guests choose a wellness outcome (such as better sleep, vitality, detoxification, overall wellness) and then are matched with a water therapy to achieve the desired result. Water may be used in rhythmic water-pressure wave massages, as steam, in different temperatures to invigorate or calm, and even in water tastings infused with herbs and essential oils. An aromatherapy menu allows guests to choose custom-blended scents for treatments; some products are even edible for a full five-sense experience.

The property has its own shopping plaza, five restaurants, a private beach club, two pools (family and adults-only) and a partnership with Los Angeles’ The Hotel Café, which brings in musicians to perform monthly, timed to the full moon. It’s all part of Aragonés’ plan to bring together all the joys in life: music, art, world-class cuisine, and architecture in a place where guests can contemplate life, or the ocean, without interruption.

At the new Mar Adentro Hotel & Residences on the southern tip of Baja California, minimalist designs inside and out put emphasis on the surrounding waters. Water is also put to use in the resort’s rejuvenating spa treatments.

Boulders Resort & Spa

Carefree, Arizona

On the heels of a multimillion renovation finished in December, **Boulders Resort & Spa** (theboulders.com) also revamped the treatment menu at its 33,000-square-foot spa. Based on a Zen desert lifestyle theme, treatments are grounded in ancient healing traditions and incorporate unique properties of the desert. The treatments are categorized according to intentions, such as to destress (Desert Zen), hydrate and nourish (Radiant Oasis), or discover the self (Global Shaman). Guests choose a category and make treatment selections from it. For example, the Yuzu Sage Splash (Desert Zen) starts with a body polish of powdered herbs, honey, and salt followed by a Vichy shower and a desert sage, yuzu, and jasmine body lotion. The Lotus Blossoming Massage (Global Shaman) takes a mind-body-soul approach, using seven different oils to align the body's seven chakras.

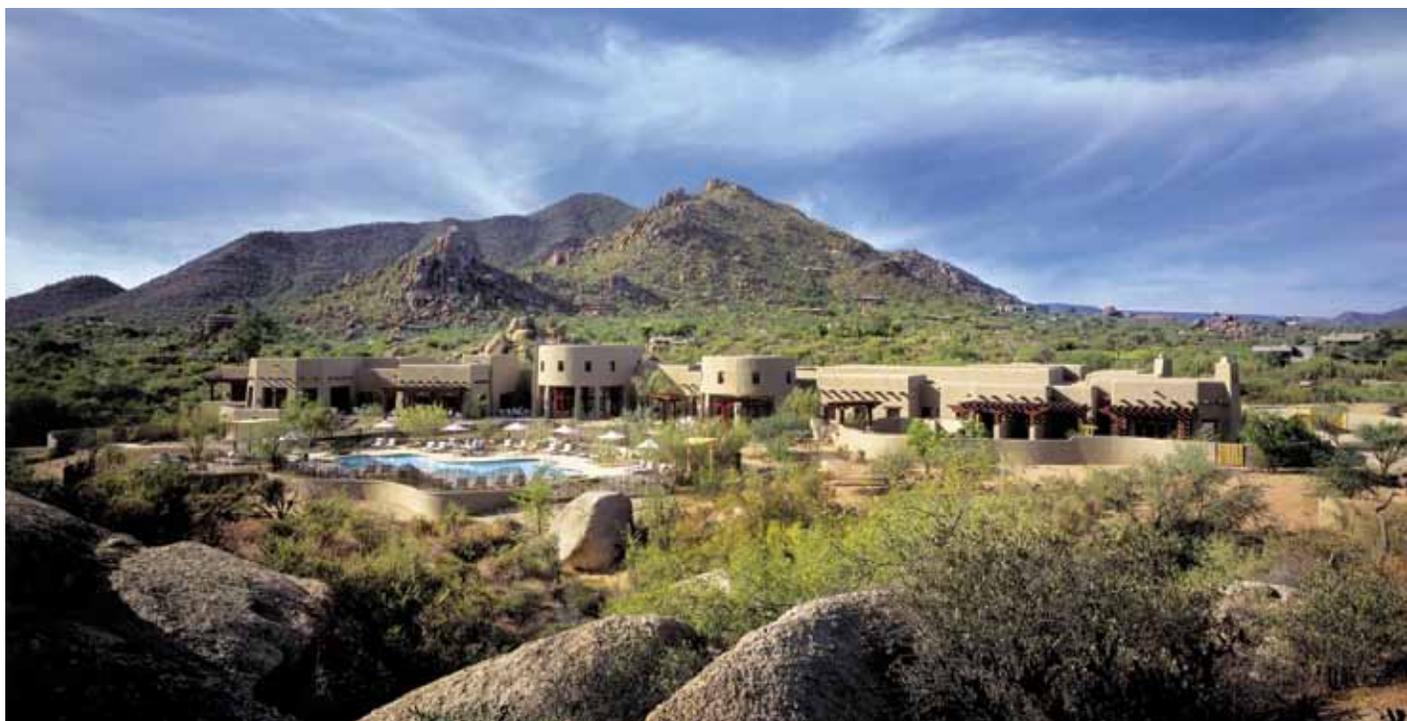
Outdoors, guests take inspiration from the stunning landscape—including the 12-million-year-old boulder piles from which the property takes its name—as they meditate in the on-site labyrinth or Native American tipi or meander through the 5,600-square-foot organic garden with a reflection pond. Fruit trees, herbs, seasonal vegetables, and native Sonoran desert edible plants in the region serve as inspiration for menu items at the Spa Café and in spa treatments (guests are invited to pick something to use in a spa treatment or in a drink). There's also an array of complimentary classes (yoga, Pilates, water fitness, Zumba, TRX suspension training, indoor cycling, tai chi, and more) offered every day at the fitness center, in addition to guided hikes, mountain biking, and rock climbing.

The property's new design—which included gutting and renovating the main lobby, 160 casitas, and restaurant—added a new lounge but preserved the architectural history by leaving the vigas (exposed rafters) and adobe dwellings in place. Interiors have an Old West feel, with Native American patterns, teal and orange accents, regional art, and mixed woods.

All casitas (rooms from \$349 a night) have wood-burning fireplaces and patios or balconies; there are also larger villas and haciendas with full kitchens and laundries and some with private pools; the five-bedroom Villa Retreat has two full kitchens, a catering kitchen, and a pool and Japanese soaking tub.



Built to appear like one of the rocky outcroppings that encircle it, Boulders Resort & Spa in central Arizona uses elements from its desert environment to refresh guests with new treatment offerings, a meditative labyrinth, and a Southwestern motif that includes spacious patios and wood-burning fireplaces.





Built into the landscape about 6 miles north of the Arizona border in southern Utah, the secluded Amangiri resort offers sweeping views of Canyon Point's majestic rock formations.





Amangiri spa treatments take cues from holistic Navajo healing traditions, and movement classes include two types of yoga. The resort's floor-to-ceiling windows bring the scenery indoors.



Amangiri Canyon Point, Utah

Amid a landscape that from a distance seems stark and cold, a warmly lit group of dwellings appears: 34 suites nestled at the base of primeval rock formations offer total seclusion and respite in Utah's canyon country. **Amangiri** (aman.com), a destination spa and wellness hideaway, blends in architecturally with the surrounding landscape, using natural hues and materials, which, like the mesas and buttes that surround it, reveal their beauty only upon closer examination. Subtle changes occur as the eyes relax and as the light changes throughout the day: rock and sand that at first appear smooth are pocketed with designs; what seemed monochromatic white and beige suddenly explodes in a riot of color.

The 600-acre property is located in an empty valley with views unsullied by development. The nearest town of Page, Arizona, is 16 miles away; the shores of Lake Powell, serene and still in winter, require only a 12-mile drive. Average temperatures in January and February are in the 40s, but the pool (stunningly built around existing rock escarpments) is heated, and all indoor and outdoor activities (hiking, horseback riding, hot air ballooning) except water sports are still available.

The 25,000-square-foot spa is based on the holistic and healing traditions of the Navajo, using the four elements of life and destruction—earth, wind, fire, and water—to restore *hózhó*, a Navajo word meaning beauty, harmony, balance, and health. All treatments begin with a Native American smudging ritual, where burning sage removes all negative energy and allows healing to take place. Massages, scrubs, wraps, and flotation therapy use natural elements like Dead Sea salt, Sedona red clay, beeswax, and lavender.

There are daily movement classes, but the idea at Amangiri is for guests to create bespoke experiences rather than to show up for always-offered, one-size-fits-all classes. However, new "Frontiers of Movement" retreats (the first was last November; the next is March 11-14; \$2,000 per person plus room rate.) bring guests together for planned group wellness activities. The purpose of the retreat, says group movement director Donato Helbling, is to use "movement as a vehicle to explore our limitations, deepen our intuition, and challenge our fears."

Two types of yoga—Budokon and FlowIntuit—offer opposite experiences. Budokon combines martial arts, yoga, meditation, and philosophy for an "explosive, powerful, and playful practice," Helbling says, while FlowIntuit is more "intuitive, soft, and fluid." Group hikes, morning meditation, sound baths (meditation facilitated by chimes, gongs, and other sounds), learning to play crystal bowls, lectures, and entertainment such as stargazing and Navajo storytelling are also part of the retreat.

Suites (from \$1,250 per night for two, including meals) are as simple and elegant as the landscape: concrete walls, white stone heated floors, and furniture featuring rawhide, natural timbers, and blackened steel fittings. Each has a private courtyard with a dining table and a desert lounge with a fireplace and daybed to enjoy what a stay at Amangiri is really all about: the solitude and serenity of the natural world. ♦

