

**SUN, SEA AND... MUD?**  
**SPAS IN SPAIN OFFER REJUVENATION IN**  
**YEAR ROUND TEMPERATE CLIMATE**

Madrid, SPAIN – February 8, 2007 – Americans' interest in spa vacations is rising dramatically. A survey conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) last November found more than 54 percent of American travelers were interested in going to a spa or a place to relax and rejuvenate themselves. Almost a third (28 percent) reported they were more interested now compared with five years ago. In 2005, 33 percent of leisure travelers said access to a spa was a primary consideration in making their vacation plans.

Spa vacations are certainly all the rage today, but spas have been around in Spain for more than 2,000 years. When the Romans colonized most of the country in the first century B.C. they brought with them their culture of bathing. In fact, the ancient Roman term for the building that houses public baths, *balnea*, has come down to modern Spanish as *balnearios*, or spas. Roman bath-houses, called *thermae*, were included in private villas, town houses, even forts. Later the Moors continued the tradition and water, and especially the hammam were integral elements in the design of some of the country's most emblematic buildings.

Spain offers visitors a tremendous variety of spa experiences in hundreds of different scenic locations throughout the country. With 8,000 miles of coast – Spain borders the Mediterranean to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the north and west – spas in the coastal areas take full advantage of the healing powers of sea water in their therapies. The country has some 2,000 registered thermal springs in beautiful natural surroundings in the mountains, in dense forests and by the sea. Do you fancy a spa resort on the beach along the Costa Brava? Would you prefer bathing in a thermal center in the Spanish Pyrenees or in the Sierra Nevada? Would you choose a coastal lake for mud wraps? Perhaps best of all for spa goers, Spain has one of the mildest climates in Europe with most of the country enjoying over 300 days of sunshine.

During the first golden age of spas in Spain, in the late 1800s, properties of the country's natural springs were believed to be able to cure everything from dropsy to

infertility. At the turn of the century, European royalty and the ruling elite often chose to “take the waters” in a resort like Mondariz, one of the continent’s legendary spas in a class with Evian and Baden Baden. More than 100 years later, experts are forecasting that spas are returning to their origins as centers for bathing and water treatments. In the 1990s spa resorts in Spain began upgrading their facilities and the majority has now completed major refurbishments. Today, elegant turn-of-the-century architectural gems come equipped with state-of-the-art technology and offer all the latest body treatments, facials, massages as well as cosmetic procedures in addition to their life-enhancing mineral-rich waters.

In almost every corner of Spain some 120 spa resorts have once again become shrines to the healing power of water. In Galicia’s Rías Baixas, the 5-star **Gran Hotel Hesperia La Toja** sits on La Toja Island and is renowned as one of Spain’s best spa hotels. Completely refurbished in 2005, it is celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Its new modern spa and thermal club offers special treatments using the mineral-rich waters and mud from the area. Nearby in Pontevedra, the **Mondariz Spa** has been attracting the health-conscious since 1846. Three majestic granite buildings are equipped with the latest techniques – steam baths, jets-showers, Finnish saunas and hydro massage baths – all using the mineral waters that have been renowned for more than 150 years. The **Gran Hotel Balneario Puente Viesgo** in Cantabria has bath houses near the thermal springs that date to 1766. Less than 30 miles from Santander on the banks of the River Pas, this four-star complex opened 16 years ago and added another 40 rooms two years ago. The recently opened three-floor “Palace of Water” spa spans 3000 square feet and features a large swimming pool, a children’s pool, various saunas, a hot water pool and an open-air dry sauna. The resort is popular with athletes, and members of various Olympic, World Cup and European Cup teams are regulars here. At 5300 feet above sea level, the five-star **Gran Hotel Panticosa** in Huesca, in the Aragón Pyrenees has dramatic views of mountains, lakes and waterfalls. Set between Encineta Mountain and the Cidacos River, the four-star **Balneario Arnedillo La Rioja** is surrounded by pines and beech. Rushing waters and the scent of rosemary and lavender fill the air.

Voted “Best Resort and Spa in Europe” three years ago, the **Hotel Termes Montbrío** in Tarragona dates from the turn of the century and is set in a lush flowering landscape of

bougainvillea and exotic flowers and towering sequoias and fruit trees. Natural springs – first sourced by the Romans – abound on the 10-acre resort. Four years ago a new Spa Aquatonic and Leisure Centre opened with a 4300-square feet area of thermal water. Here guests can relax in nutrient-filled waters and de-stress in some 95 treatment rooms or opt for turn in a giant Jacuzzi, Turkish bath, saunas, mud and seaweed Jacuzzis, or try an electrotherapy treatment. The **Hotel Balneario Vichy Catalán** near Girona opened in 1981 and just last year restored its striking Modernist façade.

In 2008 a luxurious spa resort will open in the picturesque town of Arties in the Val d’Aran in the Spanish Pyrenees. Arata Isozaki – known for the Olympic Stadium in Barcelona and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles – is designing the **Banys d’Arties** using the natural stone and slate found in these mountains. The complex will include a 25-suite super luxury hotel and another five-star of 30 rooms, a 32,000 square-foot-spa and three restaurants including one in the spa. Plans call for reclaiming the baths dating from 1817 which have been unused for 40 years. Built around a central interior pool, the thermal complex will include a vaulted roof with 24-foot ceilings.

The mud and clay of the **Mar Menor** in the Murcia region have been renowned for centuries. Several resorts around this 65-square-mile lake including the La Manga Club and the Intercontinental offer treatments that use warm salt water and this local clay which have purifying and therapeutic properties. The **Balneario de Archena** in Murcia is Spain’s oldest spa resort, dating back more than 2000 years. Here the Romans built a spa for their soldiers. Later in the Middle Ages, the baths belonged to the Knights of Santiago and the holy order of Saint John used the waters to cure their wounds. Close by the Segura River and set amid palms, eucalyptus and lemon trees, the two-million square-foot thermal complex offers the latest technology in a pristine setting. In nearby Alicante, the owner of a Spanish football team recently purchased the **Balneario de Aigües**, a spa built in 1816 that has been unused since the 1960s. He plans to invest \$38 million into creating a resort with 132 suites and rooms and an extensive spa.

Known as the “Fountain of Health” since the 1770s because of the restorative properties of its drinking water, **Lanjarón** is Andalusia’s most renowned *balneario*. Numerous hotels offer therapies for digestive or respiratory problems, stress and rheumatism that use the medicinal waters from five natural springs originating from the

Sierra Nevada Mountains. Its prize-winning water attracted royalty as well as distinguished philosopher Bertrand Russell, writer Virginia Woolf and composer Manuel de Falla. The spa has a huge ballroom lit with magnificent chandeliers testifying to Lanjaron's continued renown in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most famous resorts in Europe, the **Byblos Andaluz** melds graceful Moorish architecture – beautiful Andalusian patios and the ever-present sound of flowing water – with a 26,000-square-foot spa. The resort's thalassotherapy center features three indoor heated sea water pools, saunas, a hammam and 35 treatment rooms. The resort is located in Mijas, between Marbella and Málaga on the Costa del Sol, one of the first areas to witness the dawn of the second golden age of Spain's spa tourism. And to come full circle, last year the **Caracala Spa** opened at La Cala Resort, also on the Costa del Sol – complete with crystal sauna, herbed steam room and igloo. Named after the Roman emperor who opened one of the most beautiful *balneas* in Rome in 217 A.D., the resort aims to continue the almost 2,000-year-old tradition.

For further information about Spain, contact the Tourist Office of Spain in New York (212-265-8822); Miami (305-358-1992); Chicago (312-642-1992) or Los Angeles (323-658-7188) or go to [www.spain.info](http://www.spain.info)