

Need a facial at 4 p.m.? No way? Oh yes, with WaySpa

Joanne Blain

Vancouver Sun

October 19-25, 2006

Website Savvy Torontonians ease the search with critiques and booking connections to 200 in Canada and the U.S.--and eight in Vancouver

No one wants to get all stressed out just looking for a spa to relax in. But a solution is just a few keystrokes away.

WaySpa.com is the creation of Torontonians Jeremy Creed and Peter Adamo, who thought it should be as simple to find and book a spa online as it is to reserve a hotel room or buy a plane ticket.

The site got up and running two years ago "and people really took to it quickly," Creed said. "Our customers are telling us that they want convenience and ease when booking their spa treatments and WaySpa.com delivers on that as well as on price."

More than 200 spas in Canada and the U.S., including eight in Vancouver, are on the site. There is no booking fee, and Creed says WaySpa's prices are the same or cheaper than what a customer would pay by booking directly with the spa.

If you're planning a vacation or a business trip to another city and want to work some spa time into your schedule, the site can help you pindown the spot for a relaxing massage or a rejuvenating facial. But it's also meant for people looking for some pampering at home, says Creed.

"People may not have even heard of some spas in the city they live in," he says.

It's handy for people who like to comparison shop--the site gives you a fully description of all the services its member spas offer, from how long treatments take to what they include and how much they cost.

But don't expect a comprehensive list of all the spas in each of the 10 cities on the site. The Vancouver listing includes high-end spas like Eveline Charles and Miraj Hammam, but not major players like the Vida Wellness and Absolute Spa chains. Creed says he expects the list of participating spas in the city to continue to grow, and says plans are in the works to add Victoria and Whistler to the site.

To make sure customers don't end up in the back of a tattoo parlour getting a bikini wax from someone who spends most of her time piercing tongues, Way Spa sends out "mystery shoppers" to check out each spa before it's listed. It gives each one a rating based on both services and ambience, and customers can add their own comments to the site about their spa experiences. A preponderance of positive or negative comments can tip the spa's rating up or down.

WaySpa isn't the only player in the online spa business. But it specializes in day spas, while Spas of America (www.spasofamerica.com) focuses on resort and destination properties. And WaySpa is unique in that it allows customers to book directly from the site, rather than referring customers to each spa's own web page.

For people who are too pressed for time to click through the listings themselves, WaySpa also offers a "spa concierge," either online or over the phone, who can find you what you're looking for. So if you absolutely have to have a French manicure at 4 p.m. today in downtown Vancouver, the concierge will shop around to get you one.

The concierge will also book special events, such as a bridal shower or an office party, at a spa that will meet all your pampering needs.

But she won't phone your boss and suggest that an afternoon at a spa is just what you and your colleagues need to reward you for all your hard work. Trust me--I asked.