Muscle therapy Sausalito-style – bike, kayak, massage

By Susan Wood

SAUSALITO – The term R&R must have been born here.

When visitors are ready to venture out of their rooms in this Marin County haven, they'll find plenty to do – activities that encompass relaxation and recreation.

For starters, the historic Casa Madrona hotel sits in the center of town on Bridgeway Avenue next to the shoreline. A short walk from our hotel places us in the hands of accomplished massage therapists at the newly remodeled spa at the hotel built in 1885 overlooking Richardson Bay.

On water or land, Sausalito has something for most everyone. Photos/Kathryn Reed

At the first stop for our appointment, Kae and I received warm towels to place on our faces. It immediately took me back to my flying experience with Thai Air, which I swear could teach our domestic carriers how to treat airline passengers.

Next came a waiting room with comfy lounge chairs. We were early so I almost drifted off to sleep holding my cup of lemon water. From there, Elizabeth took me to her room for a “solar flare” body treatment, and Gary gave Kae a “Sea-to-Shore” massage. The therapies each cost $105.

His experienced hands put her to sleep. I stayed awake to ask questions about my treatment being that I usually just get a massage at spas. This was much more. Elizabeth, a Point Reyes native, started me off with a sugar scrub. After a quick shower, my skin felt silky – and not dry. It got even better from there with my shea butter rub with hot basalt stones, then a four-layer body wrap that included a solar blanket – something I would definitely appreciate on a cold, drizzly day. (That was the day before.)

The bridge to fall or even winter

Lake Tahoe’s Mark Twain said it best as I learned on our rite of passage crossing the Golden Gate Bridge on bicycles: “The coldest winter I’ve ever spent was a summer in San Francisco.”

Out of the partly sunny skies of our Sausalito hotel, Inn Above Tide, is a short route to the famed suspension bridge a few miles away. The world-renowned landmark was drenched with fog, but we didn’t care as we made our way down Alexander Avenue to the Conzelman Street parking lot. It is a huge hangout for cyclists of all abilities.

We took the 1.7-mile path on the west side of the bridge, which just reopened after being closed for a seismic retrofit. (The east side deemed for pedestrians is now closed for the construction job.)

The bridge built in 1937 accommodates six lanes of traffic, but I was more enamored with my own little world on the path and looking over the edge. When I looked down, I was amazed by the dramatic drop to a rocky coastline and open, rough seas. Upon looking up, the bridge pillars disappear in the fog. The

wind blew our bicycles to a complete stop at the occasional hairpin turns around the towers, so respect should be paid to the structure and the invigorating elements when crossing it. The Golden Gate was designated a California Historical landmark seven years ago.

From peddle to paddle, fog to sunshine

Another ideal option for things to do in Sausalito is taking a kayak through Richardson Bay – especially on a sunbathing day in which the water glistens and lies still as glass. The activity made up the highlight for the last day of our weekender based out of Inn Above Tide. A 15-minute walk down Bridgeway to Liberty Ship Way brought us to Ellie, who provided friendly tips and instruction at Sea Trek.

The touring marine company offers a long list of excursions and rentals. We took a two-person ocean kayak farther north in Richardson Bay where smiling, lazy seals and sea lions, and intrepid blue herons and pelicans allowed us to cruise up and greet them on the docks after a 10-minute paddle. Weaving down through the houseboat village turned out to be an architectural sightseeing treat. I soon discovered “houseboat” is a relative term. Some were mansions. Others had that Marin County character – complete with a peace sign on at least one exterior wall.

And without a boat or bicycle, a driving tour can provide a memorable experience using Sausalito as a launching pad. Our trip up Highway 1 included lunch at the Olema Inn with me envisioning my Tacoma truck was really a Porsche Boxster. We can all dream.

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