

SPA PARTY

Check out from stress without checking in

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Special to the Tribune

Published January 21, 2005

Those friends from L.A. and Miami who love to tease you about Midwest winters will be hinting for an invitation when you throw a beat-the-cold, best-the-stress home spa party.

Home spa parties are "in," according to Spa Finder, a major online spa resource (SpaFinder.com) that listed home party in its Top Ten Spa Trends for 2005.

The luxury of having a professional massage or manicure at home appeals to folks who would not ordinarily seek out a day spa, according to people in the mobile spa business.

"Some people are shy about going to a spa. But they are willing to try [spa treatments] at a party since it is in a secure atmosphere. When they try it, they see that they like it and want to go to a spa," said Keith Sellers, who operates Westmont-based Home Spa Sessions with wife Riley Sellers. "I get a lot of, 'Oh my god, that is so awesome.'"

And that goes whether it's "just us girls," "bacheloring-it" guys or mixed groups. "My wife recently did a party where more guys showed up than girls," Sellers said.

Many people prefer to have pros plan the whole event, but it's possible to do it yourself. Here are some tips about either route to a home spa party:

LEAVE IT TO THE EXPERTS: Having someone come in who will do the whole schmear--find and schedule certified massage therapists, nail

technicians, estheticians (face and skin treatments) and, if asked, provide food and drink--relieves the stress of throwing a party.

"It's one-stop shopping," said Kirstina Schuff, co-owner of Puur Spa, a San Diego-based mobile day spa. Bringing her spa to customers has become so popular that Schuff soon will be opening Puur branches, mainly on the East Coast. "Ever since 9/11 people have become more homebodies. They're very family- and friend-oriented," Schuff said. "It's more comforting, personal, intimate and more convenient than going out to a restaurant."

To up the spa fun a notch, professionals suggest building around a theme or personalizing treatments with clever names, whether using a spa organizer or doing it oneself.

"It's like a private label. You can call it: 'Come to the--blank, could be your name or theme or something clever--Spa.' We can personalize the event by creating a massage oil for you with the name or theme that you can send home with guests," said spa party organizer Alexis Ufland.

Her New York-based SPArty's 11 branches, including Chicago, have done parties for everyone from Fortune 1000 companies to book clubs. Two-hour SPArty packages average \$130 to \$150 per person without food.

The Caribbean and tropics are popular themes that Kim Espich, owner of Kurr Chicago Skin Care and Wellness Retreat, a busy Lincoln Park spa, has done for home and other off-site parties.

"When we did a Jamaican spa party with Bob Marley [reggae] music, we had sheets on the floor and sprinkled orchids around. With a tropical theme, we can use Pure Fiji [skin care] products of coconut creams and pineapple massage oils," Espich said.

For guys and mixed groups she has done such stuff as a Super Bowl Party. "Think 'Foot Bowl.' It's fun. It's masculine. We serve beer and have products geared to men," she said.

She has a \$10 per person fee for taking treatments on the road, in addition to the treatment costs. Some popular home services are a \$30 hand and foot treatment and a \$40 half-hour mini-massage.

How to match guests to all the treatments they want is a scheduling feat that spa organizers handle in different ways.

"Some people want a full massage table where a person will go into a room for a half-hour massage, then come back out to socialize or have a nail treatment. It's fun, but I don't think it's as much fun as mini-stations centered in a main room that allow guests to be next to each other," Ufland said. Those could include chair massages, manicures and pedicures, makeup, [painted on] henna tattoos and tarot card reading. "With mini-treatments, everyone gets to do everything," Ufland said.

Home Spa Sessions, which recommends longer treatments, provides a coordinator as part of the party package.

"You want to enjoy your own party, so you have gone to somebody to organize everything, but even then, it's a matter of getting everyone where they need to go. If you are busy saying 'OK, Janet it's your turn,' you don't have time to enjoy your own party," Sellers said.

Massages range from \$40 for 30 minutes to \$70 for an hour.

And speaking of costs: One way to cut them is to do potluck or keep food to a minimum of cheese and wine, dessert and teas. Another is to make it Dutch treat, with guests paying for spa services.

DO-IT-YOURSELF: If you are one of those people who really enjoys organizing a party, a spa party is doable. Check with a favorite massage therapist or nail technician about coming to your house or ask a friend for recommendations.

The Evanston-headquartered American Massage Therapy Association lists local massage therapists on its Web site, www.amtamassage.org. A recent AMTA survey found that the average range for member massage therapists' charges was \$16 for 15 minutes to \$84 for 90 minutes.

Massage and nail specialists bring their own supplies, but if you just want to have fun without any outside professionals, lots of shops carry beauty and skin care products, including Lush, a Canadian organic cosmetics and skin care company that recently opened a Chicago store at 859 W. Armitage Ave. (773-281-5874).

Most professionals also bring their own spa music but if you have someone who doesn't, or you're not bringing anyone in, then sort through your CD collection for "spa" sounds such as New Age artist Enya.

For more "sound" ideas, there are many places to visit online.

A few are: www.shirleycason.com/spamusic.html, www.aeoliah.com/spa-music, www.spa-la-la.com and www.serenitysupply.com. Find more help and ideas online at www.mobilehomespa.com.