

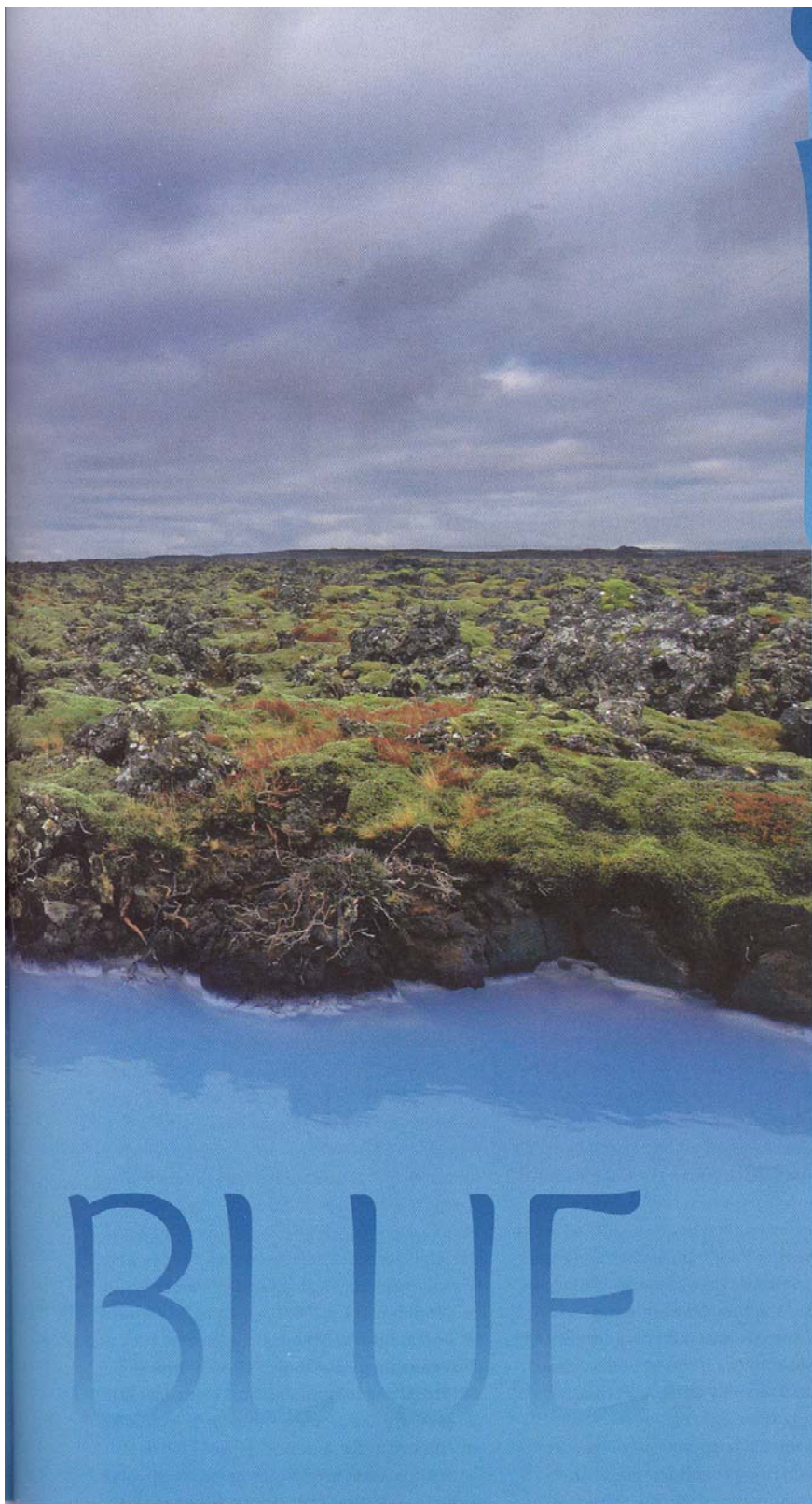
american spa

Set amid a lava field formed in the 13th century, the lagoon's rugged setting affords guests breathtaking vistas to soak in during their visit.

Visitors can discover a veritable fountain of youth in Iceland, either while becoming one with nature at the Blue Lagoon, or diving into wellness at its sister property in the world's northernmost capital city.

WRITTEN BY CRISTINA DE OLIVEIRA

INTO THE



It is safe to say that there is definitely something in the water in Iceland. This would be the easiest explanation as to why Icelanders are often touted as being the happiest people on earth or why their average life expectancy is among the highest in the world. While a direct correlation can't be assumed, we do know something about the water that bubbles in Iceland's beloved **Blue Lagoon**—the geothermal bath contains lodes of skin-healthy elements that make this site a must-see when visiting, especially for the spa-savvy traveler.

With everything from charming seaside towns to larger-than-life glaciers to serene fjords, Iceland—which is about the size of Kentucky—has a truly diverse landscape that appears utterly other-worldly. As soon as visitors leave the airport, they encounter a snaking route to Reykjavik that leads them through a 13th-century lava field, which boasts an uncanny resemblance to the surface of the moon. After spending 20 minutes on the road, thick white smoke billowing ferociously toward the sky can be seen in the distance. This result of warm water meeting with cool air serves as nature's guidepost to alert people that they have reached Grindavik and found the Blue Lagoon.

WATER WORKS

Each year, 400,000 visitors take a plunge in the Blue Lagoon, rain or shine—an astounding figure when compared to the fact that only 300,000 people live in Iceland. While the lagoon's much-lauded healing power is a major part of its allure, the unmatched bathing experience it offers can't be ignored. Uncommon with other thermal-water destinations around the world, a visit to the Blue

continued on page 150



ABOVE: The modern building that flanks the Blue Lagoon and houses relaxation rooms, fully equipped locker rooms, and an indoor treatment room has been recognized with design awards. BELOW: Silica mud is available around the lagoon for guests to apply liberally.



continued from page 149

Lagoon offers visitors the extraordinary opportunity to bathe while breathing in fresh air and soaking in the unspoiled natural setting. Just seeing the striking contrast of the lagoon's celebrated milky blue water against the surrounding sea of dark lava rock leaves a lasting impression.

Another thing that stays with visitors is the health benefit of spending time in the Blue Lagoon, which is a trove of skin-friendly ingredients. Considering the hydrotherapeutic foundation of spa (which comes from the Latin phrase *sanitas per aqua*, meaning healing with water), a true wellness experience can be had at the lagoon, which holds 1.6 million gallons of geothermal water that is renewed every 40 hours. Originating 6,560 feet beneath the ground's surface, the water's initial temperature is a scalding 464 F. Thanks to close monitoring and careful regulating, bathers actually relish a soothing 98 F to 100 F in the basin.

While a warm dip is enough to invigorate visitors, the harmonious combination of skin-saving elements is truly revitalizing. The most

active ingredients found in the Blue Lagoon are nourishing minerals, skin-strengthening silica, and collagen-boosting algae. This trifecta is the foundation of the Blue Lagoon signature skincare products, which are featured in a host of spa services offered both in the lagoon and in the lone indoor treatment room located on-site.

Although spa-ing alfresco at the lagoon is not a private affair, guests still manage to drift into oblivion during their treatments, which occur in a small offshoot pool near the main basin where up to four people are tended to at the same time. Taking place on floats in the water, the therapeutic Blue Lagoon Relaxing Massage, featuring essential oils laden with the lagoon's active ingredients, is available in varying increments: 10 minutes for \$45, 20 minutes for \$64, 30 minutes for \$83, and 60 minutes for \$112. Body treatments, such as the exfoliating Salt Glow (\$87, 30 minutes) and the Energizing & Firming Silica Treatment (\$211, 2 hours) are performed on wooden benches that are situated in the water.

Visitors don't need to sign up for spa appointments to enjoy the exfoliating and deep-cleansing



CLOCKWISE: The lagoon's waterfall offers a therapeutic break for swimmers; people enjoy an average temperature of 99 F in the lagoon year-round; the clinic offers 15 double rooms for lengthy stays.



effects of silica. Wooden buckets of the white mud are strategically placed around the lagoon so that people can slather the mixture onto themselves during their swim. It is a common sight, and an almost supernatural one, to see people wading through the water and steamy air with globs of pure white silica on their faces and shoulders. Guests clamor to apply the mud because studies have shown that silica enhances the skin's barrier and protects against environmental stresses. Not only can bathers enjoy the benefits of the mud at their leisure, but they can also indulge in an invigorating natural massage under the Blue Lagoon waterfall.

For people who prefer to experience the spoils of the lagoon in private, a limited indoor treatment menu is available, and services are performed in the modern building flanking the Blue Lagoon. Inside, a variety of massages are offered, such as the comforting Pregnancy Massage (\$124, 60 minutes) and the signature deep-relaxing Deluxe Blue Lagoon Massage (\$136, 60 minutes; \$170, 90 minutes), using the same techniques developed for the in-water therapies.

NATURAL HEALING

Offering a more comprehensive program, the **Blue Lagoon Psoriasis Clinic**, located less than a mile from the main pool, is dedicated to treating skin ailments and offers a medical spa experience. In 1981, people started noticing that skin diseases were mitigated when silica mud was applied to the affected areas and sufferers took dips in the Blue Lagoon. Thirteen years later, the original treatment center opened to much fanfare. In 2005, a bigger and better clinic opened its doors and even earned the Icelandic Architectural Award that year, featuring 15 modernly designed double rooms where guests can stay to participate in therapeutic programs. While outpatients are welcome, the clinic recommends a full treatment program of two to four weeks, which includes multiple baths per day in a part of the lagoon that is separate from the main pool or in an indoor pool, regular application of Blue Lagoon products, and optional UVB light therapy. Recognized by the Icelandic Ministry of Health, the popular clinic only accepts guests with a dermatologist's referral.

continued on page 152

BLUE LAGOON AND THE BLUE LAGOON PSORIASIS CENTER (Grindavik, Iceland)

OWNER: Blue Lagoon Holding Company

SPA MANAGER:

Dagný H. Petursdóttir

LAGOON OPENED: 1992

CLINIC OPENED: 1994

CLIENT BASE

80% from Europe, Scandinavia, U.K., and U.S.

20% from Iceland

SPACE

LAGOON: 53,820 square feet

LAGOON'S FACILITIES:

29,063 square feet;

1 treatment room

CLINIC: 27,222 square feet;

1 treatment room

SERVICES

- body treatments
- hydrotherapy
- massage
- outdoor treatments
- packages
- prenatal services

SIGNATURE SERVICE

Blue Lagoon Silica Massage for Back (\$87, 30 minutes)

MOST EXPENSIVE OFFERING

Energizing and Firming Silica Treatment (\$210, 2 hours) and the Energizing and Nourishing Algae Treatment (\$210, 2 hours)

PRODUCT LINE

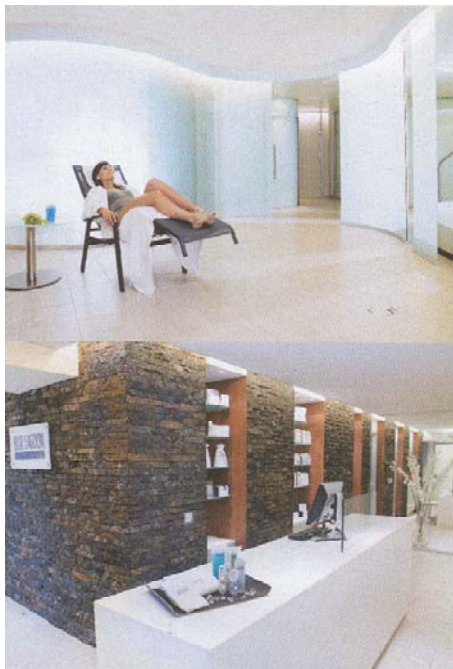
-Blue Lagoon Signature Products

EQUIPMENT

-Blue Lagoon Signature slippers and robes

ARCHITECT

Sigríður Sigthorsdóttir (Reykjavik, Iceland)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Minimalist decor complements the spa's modern treatments; treatments in the flotation tank offer the ultimate relaxation; the use of lava rock accents throughout the spa is a throwback to the Blue Lagoon.

continued from page 151
URBAN RENEWAL

Considering the wild popularity of the Blue Lagoon and the fact that bathing in thermal waters is an integral part of Iceland's healthy culture, it should also be noted that 70 percent of the lagoon's guests are from outside of Iceland. For locals who prefer not to make the 45-minute trek out to the lagoon, **Blue Lagoon Spa** opened in April in downtown Reykjavik at the cutting-edge Hreyfing health and fitness center providing city slickers with their own wellness respite. "Bringing Hreyfing and the Blue Lagoon Spa together creates new opportunities, allowing us to offer a variety of facilities in a beautiful setting and for guests to relax and rejuvenate body and soul," says managing director Ágústa Johnson.

Featuring services such as the revitalizing Nourishing Algae Treatment (\$140, 90 minutes; \$183, 2 hours), Blue Lagoon Spa offers a similar menu to that of its namesake with a few modern additions. Although there are no outdoor treatments offered, the spa still features the opportunity to soak in the benefits of hydrotherapy. The Floating Deep Relaxation/Massage (\$125, 50 minutes; \$188, 90 minutes; \$218, 2 hours) takes place in a flotation tank and is considered to be so relaxing that one treatment is believed to be as rejuvenating and restful as eight hours of sleep.

Not only does the service menu hearken the lagoon, the overall design of the spa offers a cheeky throwback. The outdoor area features carefully placed piles of lava stones brought in from the original

field, as well as saunas and a whirlpool (a.k.a. a hot pot) with geothermal water. "Opening the first Blue Lagoon Spa in Reykjavik is a very important step for us," says Johnson. According to her, several cities are currently being considered as new sites for other Blue Lagoon spas, bringing the magic of the lagoon to the global stage.

CROSSING BORDERS

Thanks to a recent partnership between the brand and Saks Fifth Avenue, Americans now have direct access to the signature skincare products on their own turf. They are being sold at the luxury department store across the country and online. **Cornelia Day Resort** (New York City) also collaborated with Blue Lagoon to launch a new component to its service menu. Starting this month, the ritzy day spa will offer three revitalizing body treatments from the original spa menu and three deluxe facials inspired by the services at the Reykjavik location.

Realizing that Icelanders only live as far from the U.S. as New Yorkers live from California, their wealth in natural resources—not to mention their *joie de vivre*—still seems to be very unfamiliar to those in the U.S. As the popularity of the potent skincare line picks up in the States, peoples' interest in our neighbors to the very North is sure to be piqued. Though having the ability to buy the high-quality skincare products from the comfort of one's home is an amazing thing, whiling the day away in the pristine environment of the Blue Lagoon is a truly incomparable experience. ■

BLUE LAGOON SPA
 (Reykjavik, Iceland)
 OWNER: Blue Lagoon Holding Company
 MANAGING DIRECTOR: Ágústa Johnson
 OPENED: April 2008

CLIENT BASE
 80% female, 20% male; mostly from Iceland

SPACE
 3,229 square feet; 7 treatment rooms

SERVICES
 -body treatments
 -facials
 -hydrotherapy
 -makeup application
 -massage
 -nailcare
 -prenatal services
 -waxing

SIGNATURE SERVICES
 Lava De Luxe Treatment (\$188, 90 minutes; \$218, 2 hours)

MOST EXPENSIVE OFFERING
 Floating Deep Relaxation/Massage (\$218, 2 hours), Lava De Luxe Treatment (\$218, 2 hours), and Relaxing Rejuvenating Clay Treatment and Massage (\$218, 2 hours)

PRODUCT LINES
 -Blue Lagoon Signature Products

EQUIPMENT
 -Blue Lagoon Signature slippers and robes
 -Ionto-Comed massage tables

ARCHITECT
 Sigridur Sighthorsdóttir (Reykjavik, Iceland)