



Reach for the spas

The 14 flats at the Fonteverde Natural Spa, near Siena, will have expansive valley views

Golf resorts? Old news — the latest villa development must-have is a luxury spa on site. Emma Wells dips a toe in the waters

I love a bit of pampering," says Damon Lawrenson, assistant chief executive of Northamptonshire county council. "At home, I get a massage every week and have regular manicures and facials. I'm a modern man — with the pace of life these days, you have to look after yourself."

Indeed, Lawrenson, 41, from St Helens, on Merseyside, is so devoted to his grooming rituals that he — along with his wife, Donna, 36, who runs a marketing business — has just bought a two-

will also be a club membership fee of about £1,500 per person per year to use the pools, gym and restaurants, though this will be waived for the first year.

So, are spa homes a new property trend — the 21st-century answer to the golf property, perhaps? "Some projects are defined by their spa," says

James Price, head of international residential development at the estate agency Knight Frank. "At others, it is just one element in mixed attractions, such as a golf course or marina. The spa is certainly a big attraction. It is often on a tick-box list for buyers, and can be a deciding factor."

Cassandra Cavanah, executive director of SpaFinder Europe, a spa research and marketing firm, is convinced. "There are more than 300 recognised 'spa communities' around the world," she says — that is, residential developments where people live full- or part-time, with on-site spas. The company's website, www.spafinder.co.uk, lists more than 130 residential spa resorts, with properties categorised by price, location and ownership options.

"With an estimated 30% of British men having visited a spa, they are joining their female counterparts in enjoying treatments," Cavanah adds. "Health-conscious baby-boomers, in particular, have a focus on wellbeing and are looking to enjoy the same amenities on holiday that they do in their daily lives."

Spas have come a long way from their Roman roots. The first were built around a series of hot springs, as far back as AD70. Next came the thermal spa boom of the 18th and 19th centuries, both in Britain and on the Continent; today, 90% of luxury hotels worldwide have spas attached. Adding residential property is an obvious next step.

The Fonteverde Natural Spa, at San Casciano dei Bagni, near Siena, in Italy, is a case in point. The spa is attached to the Fonteverde Hotel — a 17th-century Medici palace — which is planning to trade on its reputation as a luxury destination by building 14 flats a short walk away. The homes — which will go on sale at the end of October — will be constructed from traditional Tuscan materials and have views over open country. Prices are expected to start at about £365,000 for a one-bedroom flat with a terrace, rising to £795,000 for a two-bedder. Although Fonteverde says access to the spa is "free", there will be a substantial yearly management fee for the proper-

bedroom townhouse at Les Jardins de St Benoît, a residential spa development near the village of St-Laurent, in the Languedoc, for £200,000.

Here, the couple will be able to enjoy the facials and massages on offer in the spa rooms in the development's grounds, which use fruit, flowers, beeswax, olive oil, grapeseed and camomile, all produced organically in the region. "The area is beautiful and completely untouched," Lawrenson says. "The surrounding vineyards are fantastic."

The couple plan to spend long weekends at Les Jardins, where 141 one- and two-bedroom townhouses and 30 three-, four- and five-bedroom villas, built in traditional, local style, will be completed next year. Included in the price is access to the spa and use of the hydrotherapy pools, sauna and hammam; the properties can also be placed in the resort's rental programme (Garrigae Investissements; 0871 218 2103, www.garrigae.com).

Buying a second home in a spa also made perfect sense to Ken Welham, 52, from the home counties — especially because the complex he chose in southern Spain has good access to a world-class golf course. Welham, who works in retailing, and his wife, Barbara,

ties, still to be confirmed. Spa treatments here focus on anti-ageing and bathing rituals in the mineral-rich thermal waters. (There's even a special pool for pets.) Treatments such as massages are not included in the price of the property, but they may be discounted (Fonteverde Living; 00 39 578 572362, www.fonteverde-living.com).

So be warned: owning a home on a development with a deluxe spa won't necessarily mean a daily pummelling by masseurs or detoxifying algae wrap free of charge. Most spas will charge some form of membership or annual fee, and you can guarantee that there will be individual pricing for beauty treatments. On the other hand, use of facilities such as pools, saunas, hammams and gyms is often included, and for dedicated spa-lovers, design details such as treatment rooms in your own home — as at Soneva Kiri, in Thailand — and a spa on your doorstep, guaranteeing privacy and eliminating the need to drive post-treatment, are attractive.

"Do consider your individual needs before buying," Cavanah suggests. "If you are a young family, is the indoor pool child-friendly? Will your renters have full access? Where possible, visit on holiday first, and check that you like the treatments and therapists."

If you want more from your holiday than oil and acupressure, head for an activity-orientated residential resort. At Ambergris Cay, a 1,100-acre island in the Turks and Caicos, an archipelago in the British West Indies, DPS Sporting Club, an American company, is building 550 houses. With one to four bedrooms, and prices ranging from £330,000 to £3.2m, they have already attracted 10 British buyers (DPS; 020 7664 8812, www.dpsdevelopment.com).

The private island — where Bruce Willis and Gwyneth Paltrow have reportedly bought homes — has a deep-water marina and a private landing strip. Membership will cost about £650 per month, which will cover activities such as scuba-diving, kayaking and bonefishing, as well as access to the spa. The prices of à la carte treatments have not yet been fixed, but Ambergris Cay's spa will have five individual treatment pavilions, all with ocean views and Japanese soaking tubs on their terraces.

Tim Weller, a publisher who lives in London, has bought a 4,000 sq ft house there with beach frontage for £3m. "It was a complete impulse purchase," says

also in her early fifties, bought two fully furnished two-bedroom penthouses at the newly launched Champneys Marbella spa resort for £536,000 and £570,000, off-plan.

"It was an easy choice," he says. "I like Marbella for holidays, and I love golf and playing in the warmer winter weather. My wife loves Champneys — the facials, treatments and exercise and relaxation classes — and I'll certainly be having the odd massage. It's a well-known, popular brand, so we will keep one flat for use by family and friends and put the other in the rental pool."

This is Champneys' first foray into residential property; it already has four UK resorts and a countrywide network pop-in high-street spas. In the hills above Marbella, 48 flats and 24 penthouses are being built, to be completed by summer 2010. The 32,000 sq ft spa at the Moorish-style resort will have 25 treatment rooms, indoor and outdoor pools, a hammam and a full range of treatments using own-brand products, with prices starting at about £15.

Two two-bedroom penthouses are still on sale, for £775,000 and £818,000; two-bedroom flats start at £555,000 (Champneys Marbella; 01442 291200, www.champneysmarbella.com). There

Weller, 46, who is thrilled to report that his home is intact after Hurricane Ike swept over the island earlier this month. "I was in the area on holiday, visited the island and fell in love. But it's my wife and daughter who will be using the spa."

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