

# Spa's Gold Standard



The Golden Door's quiet paths promote reflection

Looking for a new you in the New Year? You might not have to go very far. Since 1958, the Golden Door in Escondido has been the gold standard for destination spas. Barbra Streisand, Martha Stewart, and Nicole Kidman are just a few of the A-listers who have made their way down Deer Springs Road en route to rest and recovery in this 377-acre sanctuary.

When I visited recently, I was surprised to find that the Golden Door resembles a Japanese *honjin* country inn, complete with serene sand gardens, koi ponds, waterfalls, and stone lanterns — and somehow this style blends beautifully into the backdrop of rustic rural San Diego County. I was also surprised to learn that the architect was my friend and fellow La Jolla Robert Mosher.

The 40 rooms — all single occupancy — are arranged around four courtyards and come equipped with workout clothes, straw hats,

windbreakers, warm-up suits, *yukatas* (Japanese robes), Sensi sandals, skin care products, and a palpable sense of quiet and tranquility. Breakfast is delivered on a tray at 7:30 along with a customized schedule of each guest's activities. Maids service the rooms five times a day and pick up laundry dropped between hikes, the pool, tennis, exercise classes, and meals.

Daily massages, included in the fee for the week, are done en suite. The rate (discounted \$500 for Southern California residents) also includes two herbal wraps, daily skin care sessions, a manicure, pedicure, make-up lesson, guided hikes, a selection of over 40 fitness classes in seven gyms and two swimming pools, use of the facilities in the bathhouse (sauna, Japanese hot tub, hydrotherapy tub, steam room, and herbal wrap area), a four-to-one staff ratio that ensures plenty of pampering, and three meals and three snacks a day.

The goal at the Golden Door is to

teach new habits that can be continued at home. Portion-controlled meals, about 1,100 calories a day, contain no red meat, but lots of organic vegetables grown on the property. As a reward, guests enjoy lamb and a glass of wine on Saturday night before their Sunday morning departure.

San Diego Deborah Szekely, who celebrated her 90th birthday in May 2012, founded the Golden Door (along with Rancho La Puerta) and still gives after-dinner talks a couple of times a month.

"I spent much of my life teaching people how to befriend their bodies and joyfully extend their lives, so I don't feel terribly surprised to be turning 90," she said at the time.

Szekely advises a regular regimen of drinking vegetable juices, and talks about her "smidgen theory" — warning that a lifetime of smidgens adds up to trouble. The perfect



Japanese-style stone lanterns and waterfalls contribute to the tranquility of the Golden Door





A customized schedule of each guest's activities is included on the breakfast tray

example being artificial sweetener. A few packets every day quickly adds up to a truckload every decade.

She also extols the virtue of exercise ("an absolute must"). She does Pilates in her home gym, swims laps in her pool, and enjoys neighborhood walks.

The Golden Door's guests, ranging in age from about 40 to 75, are also focused on fitness and losing weight, but the mind-body component is very important. They come here as much to lift their spirits as to tone their thighs. Some repeaters have been here more than 100 times and are very familiar to the staff, who have

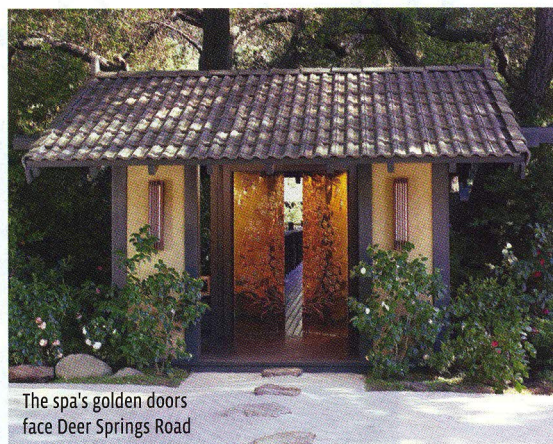
supported them through life-threatening illnesses and life-changing incidents.

In 1996, the Golden Door was the first spa to build a labyrinth and implement a Labyrinth Mindfulness program. It is a replica of the famous floor labyrinth placed in Chartres Cathedral sometime between 1194 and 1220. Not a maze, the path is a classic eleven-circuit design on which you walk continuously and meditatively toward the center, then back out again. Szekely believes that labyrinths can be an agent of significant, even radical change.

On the last night of the week, guests write on a piece of paper something that's on their heart that they know they need to release. Then in a spiritual ceremony, they walk the candlelit labyrinth and drop the paper in the fire pit at the center of the circuit.

I can't think of a better way to start the New Year. (760.744.5777, [www.goldendoor.com](http://www.goldendoor.com))

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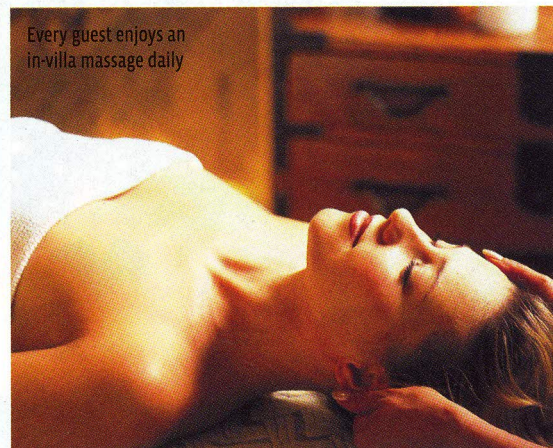
The spa's golden doors face Deer Springs Road



Fitness facilities include two swimming pools and seven gyms



Deborah Szekely believes labyrinths can be an agent of change



Every guest enjoys an in-villa massage daily