



clockwise: The Allison Inn & Spa hot tub; view from Salishan Spa; manicures and pedicures



## SALISHAN SPA AND THE ALLISON INN & SPA IN OREGON

# delightful surprises in the NORTHWEST

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**WHEN YOU THINK OF A GREAT DESTINATION** for a resort spa, Oregon is probably not the first place that pops into your mind ... but you just might get a delightful surprise if you come to this corner of the Pacific Northwest. I recently had the privilege to sit and chat with the spa directors of two nationally acclaimed spas, and they shared gems of information that we can all benefit from.

### Salishan Spa & Golf Resort

For sheer jaw dropping beauty and majesty, there is nothing quite like the Oregon coast. Natives and tourists alike have long made the trek over the coastal mountains to relax, play and



enjoy the miles of beaches that are protected for public use. With vistas that stretch as far as the eye can see and an ocean that can either be raging or as smooth as glass, the feel is as it was hundreds or thousands of years ago. In the midst of this sits a property called Salishan, built adjacent to the Siletz Bay, about two hours from Portland. Salishan is an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary and a forest preserve that covers 250 acres of land. Salishan is all about the "view." When the spa was added to the hotel and golf course in 2005, it was constructed so that guests could experience not only the benefits of a spa but the magic of the views. The approximately 9,000 square foot space includes a men's area, a women's area and some shared relaxation areas. The outdoor pool is shared, and swimwear is required. The result is a completely Zen focused experience.

Becoming a *Condé Nast* top rated spa (ranked number 12 in the nation, tied with Wynn Las Vegas) is an illustrious accomplishment the Salishan Spa has achieved; however the location of Salishan Spa makes this recognition even more of a feat. Spa director Don Richardson notes that it is far easier to start a spa in a place where there are similar types of spas nearby. Spas are like art galleries; people tend to go where there are several, and then visit several while they are

there. Although the management was told they wouldn't last six months due to the seasonal nature of tourism on the Oregon coast, Salishan has been profitable ever since it opened its doors. The effect of the recession on Salishan Spa has been little to none.

I talked at length with Richardson about how they have survived and prospered. He explained that the vision and backing by the owners came first. If you are going to do a world class resort spa, you cannot cut corners in the design, construction and all the details that make it "right." The next step is finding the right staff. Each member of the team must embrace the same philosophy, and they must love and embrace where they live, in addition to providing top quality services. Employees at Salishan make good money, but they make 80 percent of their wages in the summer months. "Our Christmas season is July," Richardson told me. Everything about the Salishan Spa had to be flexible, with the ability to expand and contract with the seasons. The staff are not required to sign non-compete clauses because management knows they need to do whatever is necessary to carry themselves through the slow winter months.

Coastal winter weather can range from merely grey skies to raining by the bucketload. Almost every year the coastal highway experiences at least one or two closures due to slides from the



steep mountains that rise up sharply from the coast, or from a road undermined by too much water. If an occasional winter guest wants to drop in for an unscheduled treatment, consideration is given by management as to how far the employee would have to drive, and under what conditions. Management's level of concern for staff was impressive, and its position is sound, as driving on the narrow two lane roads can indeed be treacherous.

"Some of my team would have to drive 45 minutes across low lying areas that routinely have storm flooding issues, or come down from up in the mountains," explains Richardson. "I can't lose sight of the big picture and risk them." This

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BY JUDITH CULP

Oregon Coast: Lee Prince/Shutterstock.com

photos courtesy of Salishan Spa and The Allison Inn & Spa





Salishan Spa pedicure

scenario is rare, but management has planned for it by offering complimentary use of the facility to the guest. That being said, the locals have embraced Salishan, and now Christmas holidays and Valentine's Day are getting more attention. Some of the staff have been with the spa since it opened; there is very low turnover. They love what they do and where they live. The fact that the area has limited shopping does not bother them in the least.

"We definitely cannot be a cookie cutter type spa, and what works for spas in Las Vegas isn't going to work on the Oregon coast," Richardson told me. She explained that vendors have to be flexible as well, not just the spa staff. "We don't do business with vendors with minimum opening orders or minimum reorders," he explains. "Our inventory has to expand for summer and contract for winter because we focus on more natural products with a shorter shelf life." They test new products during the slow winter months to make sure they are a good match for their specific way of doing things. "It can be a great product, but if it doesn't work with your equipment or technique, then it's not for you." His last tip is to remember why you are there. At Salishan, the staff is there to pamper people. When they opened, they catered to a clientele that was 90 percent female and 10 percent male. Now it is 60 percent female and 40 percent male. The golfers have definitely discovered the wonders of the spa and the benefits of pampering! Want to take a look at Salishan? Visit [www.salishan.com](http://www.salishan.com). It's worth a trip to Oregon!

## The Allison Inn & Spa

About 30 minutes from Portland is the blossoming town of Newburg, home of George Fox University. The area is known as the gateway to northern Oregon's wine country. While there are wineries all over the state, there are literally dozens of them clustered fairly close together in this particular region, and tourism is booming. It is here that the The Allison Inn & Spa, a privately owned property, is located. While the spa at The Allison hosts many tourists, there are also quite a few people who visit the spa from Portland for day or weekend getaways. Opened in August of 2009, The Allison Inn & Spa has exceeded expectations, and has already received top honors in *Travel + Leisure's* 2012 World's Best Awards, being named the number one hotel spa and number 12 resort in the continental United States. It is an amazing distinction for such a new spa. I was

excited to connect with spa director Tara Sanders and discover the secrets behind the spa's success. First came the tour. The spa is 15,000 square feet, with both separate and shared areas for male and female guests. About 25 percent of the guests are male. It is configured so that a portion of the spa can be rented out for private events, an opportunity that major companies like Nike and Intel have taken advantage of.

As with Salishan, no efforts had been spared to create a tranquil setting with amenities abounding. Sanders commented on the fact that they had a lot of non-revenue producing area. But those spaces allow them flexibility to cater to private events and to continue with their normal guest routines. In addition to the spa itself, there is a 1,000 square foot fitness center complete with a diverse selection of high-tech equipment.

The Allison does not focus on individual holidays, but rather works with the hotel to create overnight packages in a romantic setting. They have a diverse array of treatment options and include a wine influence in all their services. The spa works as an integral part of the hotel rather than independently doing their own marketing. This gives Sanders more time to focus on her team. From its inception, the owners have brought in the most experienced people to help them achieve their goals. To be successful, Sanders says it is important to get input about what you do from the best experts in your field. You can't afford not to. One area they addressed was pricing. "You need to keep prices reasonable, and then raise them when you have earned it." The Allison offers a one-hour massage for \$95, a lower price than most resort spas charge. Sanders emphasizes that a business must first earn their reputation. "You have to make a safe, warm, inviting place," she explains. "It's all about your staff. They are the people the client will connect with."

Sanders recommends interviewing for as long as it takes to find the right fit. You have to find that "perfect" person who not only has the amazing skills you want, but the personality and mindset that matches what you do. They must be totally people oriented and committed to pampering.

I asked Sanders what last tip she would like to share with *LNE & Spa* readers. "Find your niche! Focus on what you do best and the people who will use it," she advises. For more information about The Allison, visit [www.theallison.com](http://www.theallison.com). If you love spas, wine and food, add The Allison Inn & Spa and the surrounding area to your bucket list! ■

**Judith Culp** is an NCEA certified CIDESCO Diplomat. She is a contributing editor for *Milady's Standard Esthetics: Advanced*. Culp is also a teacher and the president of the NW Institute of Esthetics, which offers basic and advanced skin care training. Contact her through [www.nwinstitute.estheticsnw.com](http://www.nwinstitute.estheticsnw.com) or via email at [judy@estheticsnw.com](mailto:judy@estheticsnw.com).

