

THE AUTHORITY ON LIFESTYLE

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When I headed off for a week at the original Golden Door in Escondido, California, I expected to enjoy lots of spa treatments and return refreshed and renewed. I did not anticipate that the Golden Door's unique philosophy of health and fitness combined with the calm setting and gracious hospitality inspired by ancient Japanese honjin inns, would have a meaningful and lasting impact on my overall well being. While some come to shed a few pounds or get back into a healthy eating and fitness routine, every guest also experiences a mental shift during their stay. There is equal emphasis on inner focus, and I enjoyed the many meditation, tai chi, yoga, art and stress counseling classes that helped me regain a feeling of balance in my life long after my time at Golden Door ended.

In addition to the California location, there are now Golden Door spas located in Arizona, Utah (coming soon), Colorado, Florida, and the Caribbean. During the summer weeks, Golden Door invites cutting-edge leaders in their field to enhance your already customized week-long stay — Men's Weeks, Coed Weeks, Summer Focus Weeks and Spa Interludes are available to offer you a unique Golden Door experience. The session I spent at Golden Door was a special Art of Creative Play week designed to stimulate creativity; in addition to all the regular classes and services, I enjoyed a variety of fun watercolor, clay, treasure box-making, and ikebana classes.

Arrivals at Golden Door are staggered so that you enter the premises in private and receive personal attention from the moment you arrive at the gold and jeweled gate. Your bags are whisked away and you are given a cup of tea before a staff member walks you through an informal interview to go over dietary preferences and to work out details of your schedule based on the exercise regime that you have pre-designed. While I had my schedule tailored to a week of quiet rejuvenation, loosely planning to take it easy with hikes, yoga, meditation and beauty treatments, many guests have a different focus and choose to rev up their schedules with aerobics, core, spinning, swimming, water therapy, tennis, cardio boxing, cross training, dance or body sculpting. As the week progressed, I was able to add in tai chi classes and take additional ballet and dance classes. The choices are endless and you're not locked into any particular class. Inevitably muscles tire during the week or guests spend too much time in the sun. It's never a problem to lighten your workouts, skip classes altogether or spend a quiet lunch or dinner in your room. If you're like me and need to eat more than the three delicious meals and two daily snacks, the staff is happy to bring you healthy snacks and pots of tea or juice at a moment's notice. Obviously I greatly enjoyed an evening cooking class (complete with a finished tasting) with Golden Door's chef, Dean Rucker.

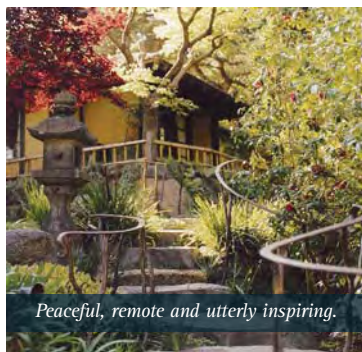
The calm and peaceful atmosphere permeates all aspects of your week as you walk to classes through Asian architecture and meticulously landscaped grounds, complete with traditional Japanese gardens, koi ponds, and a million-dollar antique collection. To help keep your mind off of the small details of life, guests are provided with fresh workout clothes daily, robes, bathhouse sandals, straw hats, a pretty blue and white yukata to don for dinner and evening activities, as well as a windbreaker and water bottle for early morning hikes. One of the most heavenly aspects of the stay are the two daily beauty treatments each guest receives. I chose to have a daily



# ENTERING THE GOLDEN DOOR

By Mary Jo Matsumoto

*Step inside the original Golden Door sanctuary.*



*Peaceful, remote and utterly inspiring.*

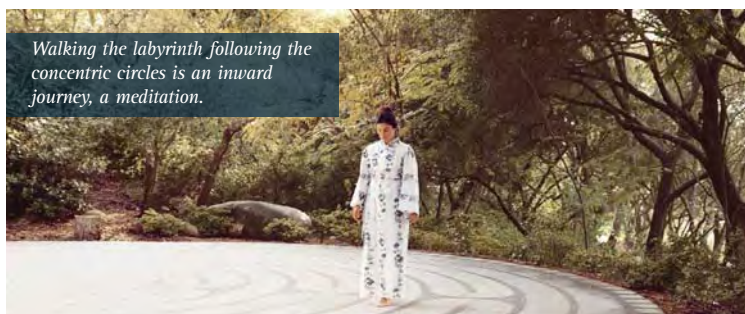


*Tranquil grounds feature traditional Japanese gardens.*

taught by Annharriet Buck, a certified stress management and guided imagery counselor, called "How To Get Happy." For those craving more, there are also fantastic private sessions available all week ranging from acupuncture, aromatherapy, counseling, dream interpretation, energy balancing, hypnosis, pilates, tennis, plus all sorts of in-room specialty treatments such as Swedish, deep tissue, lomi lomi, hot stone or Thai massages, to reflexology, reiki, water therapy and more. I chose to have a private session with Annharriet Buck, who has studied meditation and mindfulness with the renowned Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, and I'm still feeling the benefits!

On the last evening, there is candle-lit farewell ceremony at the labyrinth. Although people come for a variety of reasons, everyone ends up looking and feeling better and happier. It's the first spa I've been to that truly addresses mind, body and spirit equally if you're willing to show up for classes. The staff was incredible — they were sincerely caring and I am still in awe of how kind the guests themselves were; there is a camaraderie that is built during the week that is truly special.

To experience your own personal and physical transformation, or request a brochure, you can contact Golden Door via their website, [www.goldendoor.com](http://www.goldendoor.com). For more information and reservations at this award-winning California spa retreat or any of their other distinctive locations, please call toll-free at (800) 424-0777, or send an email to [reservations@goldendoor.com](mailto:reservations@goldendoor.com).



*Walking the labyrinth following the concentric circles is an inward journey, a meditation.*

facial in the world class spa facilities as well as a daily in-room massage. Within a day or so, it's hard not to experience what Golden Door staffers call "spa-brain," the state of mind where you are in a wonderful, relaxed zone and cannot remember the problems you arrived with.

Surprisingly, I got hooked on the daily 6 a.m. hikes and quickly moved up from the easy Meadow Hike to the 3-mile hike that takes you through different aspects of the Golden Door's 377 acres of rolling terrain. My favorite day was the silent Meditation Hike and tai chi at the top of the mountain followed by a labyrinth walk on Golden Door's replica of the labyrinth laid in the stone floor of Chartres Cathedral in France. Following the labyrinth walk, our tai chi leader led a group discussion, encouraging us to talk about the morning's revelations.

Returning to my room after morning hikes, I would always arrive to find breakfast just served on my table and would read the *New York Times* on my patio that opened on to a little stream. I'd glance over my day's schedule that arrived daily printed on a card in the shape of a Japanese fan, and head off to my daily yoga class and time with my personal trainer which was broken up with a morning broth break and time at the pool. I also managed to take in a wonderful class with dream analysis expert Tricia Kelly as well as a class

Fashion designer Mary Jo Matsumoto writes a nationally syndicated style blog at [www.trustyourstyle.com](http://www.trustyourstyle.com). She is debuting a new line of fine jewelry and a women's couture line as well as expanding her successful luxury handbag line. To view her beautiful designs please visit [www.maryjomatsumoto.com](http://www.maryjomatsumoto.com).