

Healthy Voyage

THE POKER GAME'S participants, all men from New York, include a Broadway producer, a former assistant attorney general turned novelist, a real estate developer, and a restaurateur. It is the end of the first day of the inaugural men's week at the Mayflower Inn and Spa in Washington, Conn., and the players are sipping ice water, snacking on shaved almonds, and wearing identical spa-provided gray sweat suits. Despite the players' varied professions and the unusual setting, refreshments, and dress code, the topic of conversation is typical of many poker games. It involves the spirited pursuit of the fairer sex. "Oscar Wilde believed that taking half your age and adding seven produces the age of your ideal mate."

Since opening last May, the spa has catered primarily to women, but this week the men are here to learn about and maybe adopt better diets and other healthier habits perhaps to bolster their ability to participate in the aforementioned pursuit. Over chip stacks and Texas Hold'em, a sense of camaraderie develops, and the male bonding is further fueled by group meals featuring spa cuisine that adheres to minuscule caloric counts. These breakfasts, lunches, and dinners elicit discussions of food—specifically about the heartier portions found at the guests' favorite restaurants—politics, the moral state of the nation, and the urge to order a drink.

Just uphill from the inn, where guests eat and lodge, past the outdoor pool—near which at night some of the men's week patrons, illuminated by their BlackBerry screens, wander in search of even the faintest reception—and past

a synthetic putting green on which no two putts break the same way, stands the 20,000 square-foot spa house. Here, guests weary from a day of kayaking past white-clapboard farmhouses, mountain biking along meandering trails, or climbing a 65-foot-tall rock will find a variety of massages, facials, and soaks. The spa also hosts exercise and meditation classes. "Wonderful," coos Kathryn Cooley, an instructor of a yogalike stretch-and-release class, as she helps guide an unsuspecting guest into a backward arch. Judging from his grimacing, reddening face, he seems to disagree with her assessment of his predicament.

The Mayflower's five-night men's week packages (priced from \$6,700 and scheduled this year for early June and late November) include an unlimited number of treatments and the option to individualize any of them. "We have a lot of flexibility to give exactly the right experience for that moment in time," says spa director Helen Brown. "What we like to do is to help people take something back with them. Our goal is to help you learn how to find time for yourself."

Later that night, after an afternoon of rock climbing, I do just that, deviating a bit from the spa's healthy-living philosophy and taking a seat at the bar of the inn's Tap Room. Sipping on a blackberry mojito (a compromise that takes into consideration the fruit's antioxidant qualities) calls to mind another Oscar Wilde quote: "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it."

-SHAUN TOLSON

Mayflower Inn and Spa, 860.868.9466, www.mayflowerinn.com

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you can venture into a new world
of better living.”*