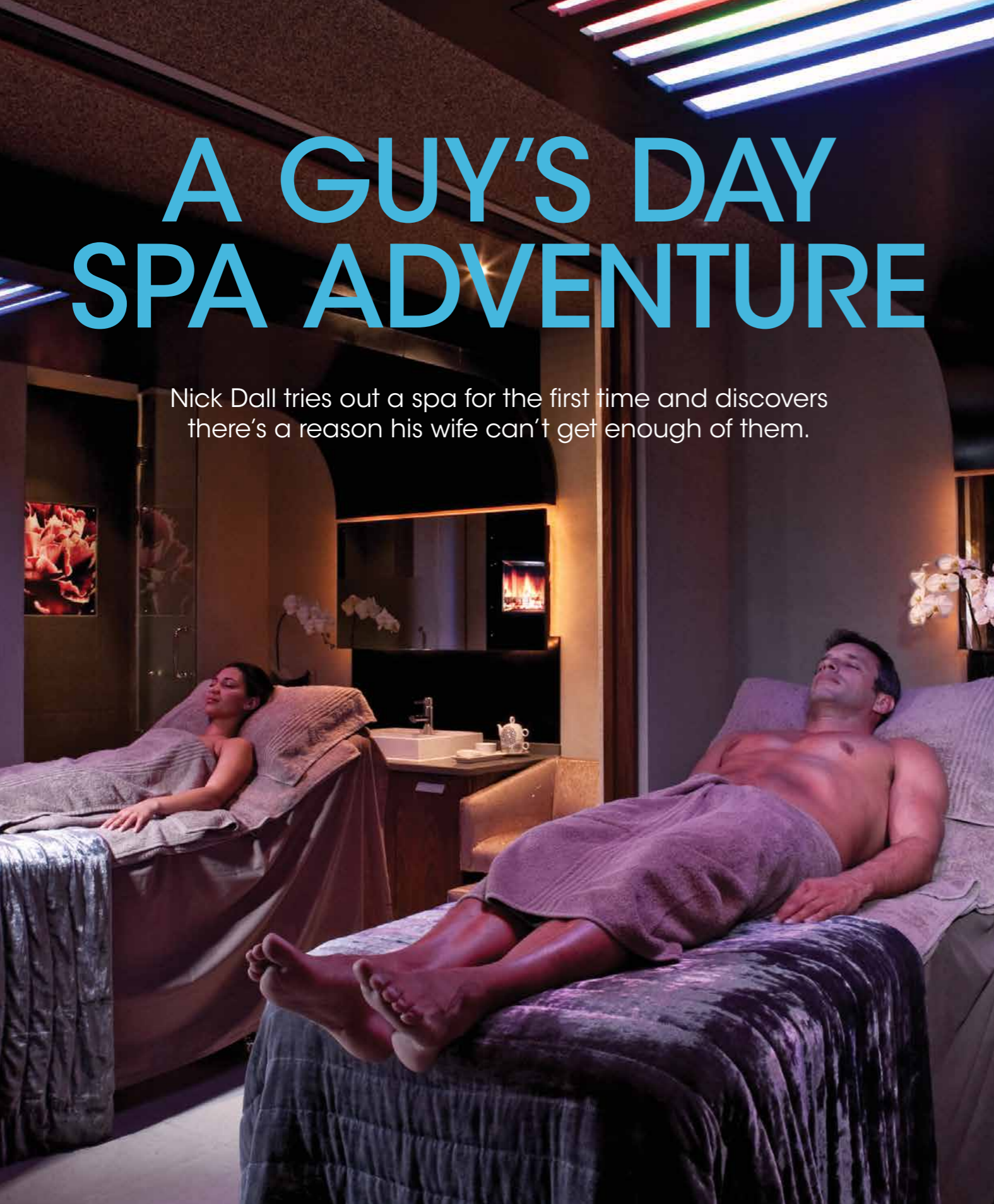


A GUY'S DAY SPA ADVENTURE

Nick Dall tries out a spa for the first time and discovers there's a reason his wife can't get enough of them.



Normally when I have a bit of time to myself I head for the mountains to go fly-fishing. My toes bash against my hiking boots and my legs and arms scrape fynbos. By the end of the day my mind is relaxed, but my body has taken a beating. But a spa holiday took me into an entirely new world where body and mind alike would be spared no indulgence.

My wife, our baby daughter and I checked into African Pride Crystal Towers Hotel & Spa in Century City, Cape Town, on a Friday afternoon, after the week to end all weeks. The room had been specially prepared for the baby, with ducks in the bath and a customised Babygro.

A BIT NERVOUS

To be honest, I was a little apprehensive about what awaited me at the hotel's Life Day Spa. As a first-timer I didn't want to do or say the wrong thing. I was immediately put at ease by the friendly welcome and the quiet patter of slippers on carpet.

Wearing a gown and the customary footwear, I padded to the Rasul chamber, a Turkish-inspired mosaic sauna room. This was a self-service treatment and perfect for a novice, as it allowed me to ease unnoticed into the spa vibe. I applied my body scrub and, as instructed, had a shower to remove it after five minutes. My skin already felt fresher than ever.

I then applied the mud (more like pink lotion) and sat back on the warm mosaics. As the room filled with steam, the

pinprick lights on the ceiling became distant galaxies. My reverie was interrupted by the tropical rain shower, the signal that this treatment was at an end. Hot water poured down from above, washing the mud away. Nobody had so much as laid a hand on me, but I'd still been pampered. The chocolates and champagne heightened the indulgence.

Next up was the flotation pool, a pond with such salty water that it mimics the Dead Sea. Once again I was left alone and my only task was to lie on my back with my head propped up on a pool noodle, and float. "Thirty minutes in the pool equates to four hours of uninterrupted sleep," said the assistant.

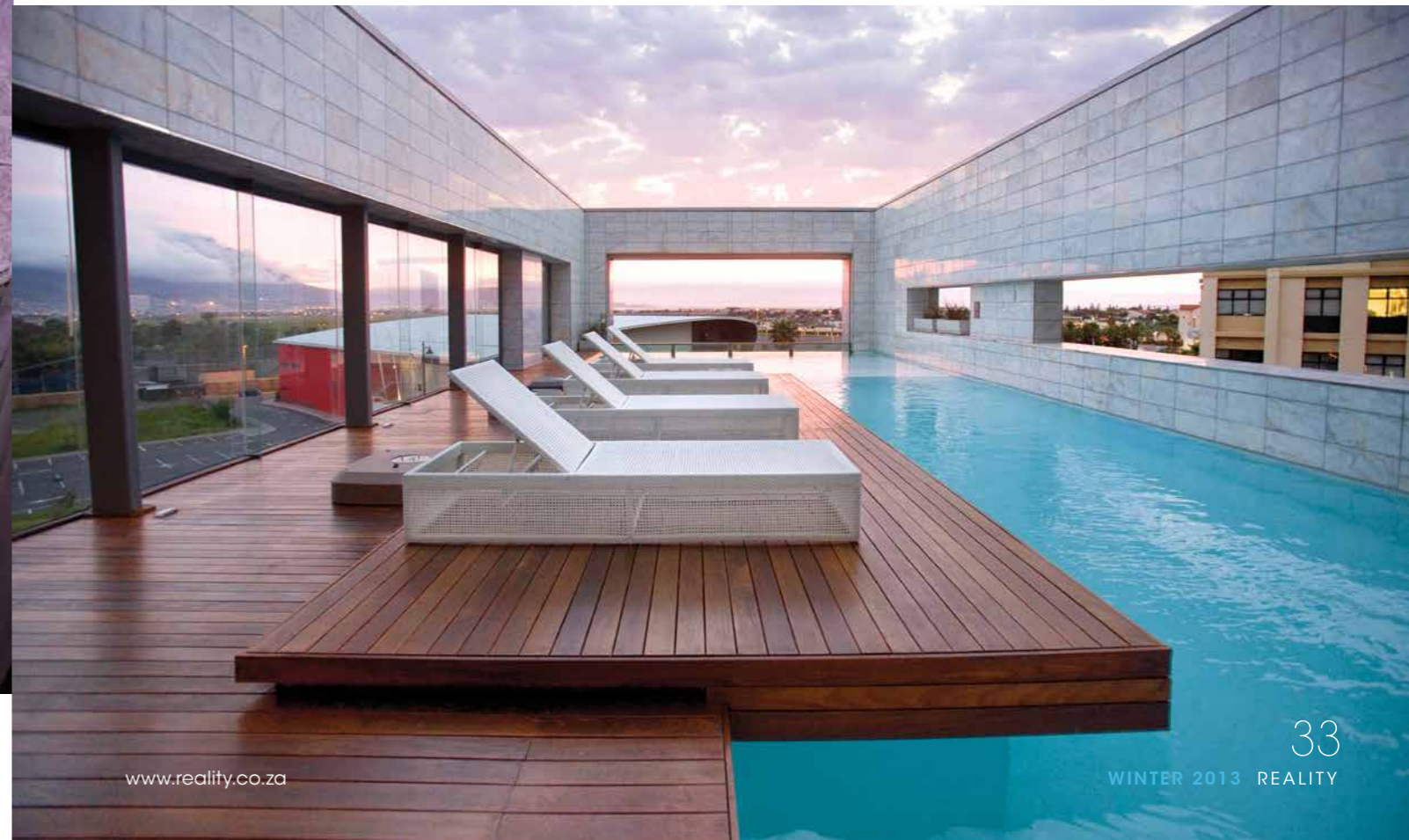
TOTALLY AT EASE

After relaxing in the waiting area with other spa goers sipping mint water and nibbling mini chocolate muffins, I was greeted by Heather, who would be giving me a back massage and the Sole Revival foot treatment.

The massage was soothing and seemingly endless. The foot treatment was pure hedonism. A soak was followed by a scrub, which in turn gave way to a Thai pressure point massage. To top it off, my feet were put into heated booties, to allow the muscles to recover from their workout. ▶

OPPOSITE: For pure indulgence, visit Life Day Spa Cape Town.

THIS PAGE, BELOW: Clients of African Pride Crystal Towers Hotel's day spa have access to the swimming pool too.



OTHER SPAS TO TRY

For Joburgers: Life Day Spa Rosebank

Life Day Spa was recently voted Best Day Spa in South Africa. All guests have complimentary use of the steam room, Swiss shower, sauna and heated pool, so it makes sense to arrive a bit early and ease into the mood.

A staggering array of treatments is on offer, and staff will consult at length to tailor-make your experience. Life Day Spa Rosebank has a Rasul chamber and a flotation pool, and I highly recommend both treatments.

Contact: 011-447-2255, www.lifedaysparosebank.co.za

For Durbanites: The Oyster Box Spa

The Oyster Box, Durban's iconic and distinguished hotel, offers day spa facilities. The spa includes six modern treatment rooms, a hydrotherapy bath, a state-of-the-art fitness centre, an infinity pool and a post-treatment tranquillity lounge. A number of journeys (packages) are available and can be tweaked to suit your needs. One unmissable facility is the authentic Turkish bath or hammam.

Contact: 031-514-5072, www.oysterboxhotel.com/the-spa



AFTERGLOW

When I got back to the room our daughter was sleeping and my wife had discovered the TV which emerges magically from the foot of the bed (and disappears again at the push of a button) and the complimentary bowl of Lindor chocolates. She had opened the curtains of the enormous floor-to-ceiling window and was watching the light drain from Table Bay. The cargo ships moored off Milnerton flickered amber before disappearing into the inky night.

We ordered room service for supper and enjoyed enormous sirloin burgers in bed. We never ordered from the pillow menu but the fact that there was one was a first for me. The standard pillows were good enough for us, and our daughter clearly agreed: for the first time in weeks we were afforded an almost full night's sleep.

MORNING SURPRISES

Before breakfast we took a tour of the hotel. It was too cold for swimming, but the pool looked eerily beautiful in the morning mist. The Ruby Bar was baby's favourite – the fibre-optic chandeliers captivated her and the nook dedicated to African explorers was full of fascinating trinkets for young eyes. The footbridge leading to the Canal Walk shopping mall was another highlight as ducks quacked and weavers chirped in the dawn mist. Breakfast was even better than we expected. I always judge a place by the quality of its poached eggs and on this count I was not disappointed. I ate mine with Norwegian salmon and washed it all down with spinach and ginger juice.

OPPOSITE: The Oyster Box Spa in Durban blends old-world elegance with chic modernity.

BELOW: Life Day Spa Rosebank features state-of-the-art equipment and award-winning therapists.

And so, after a 24-hour escape, we had to return to our normal lives, but we did so feeling re-energised and ready for the week ahead.

Contact: African Pride Crystal Towers Hotel & Spa, ☎ 021-430-5302, www.africanpridehotels.com. Life Day Spa Cape Town, ☎ 021-525-3883, www.lifedayspact.co.za ■

EXCLUSIVE OFFERS

SPA SPECIAL

Reality members get 20% off any full-body massage booked at a Life Day Spa in Joburg, Durban or Cape Town. This offer is valid until 31 August 2013, is for Monday to Thursday bookings only and excludes public holidays. Simply book and then present this article at reception.

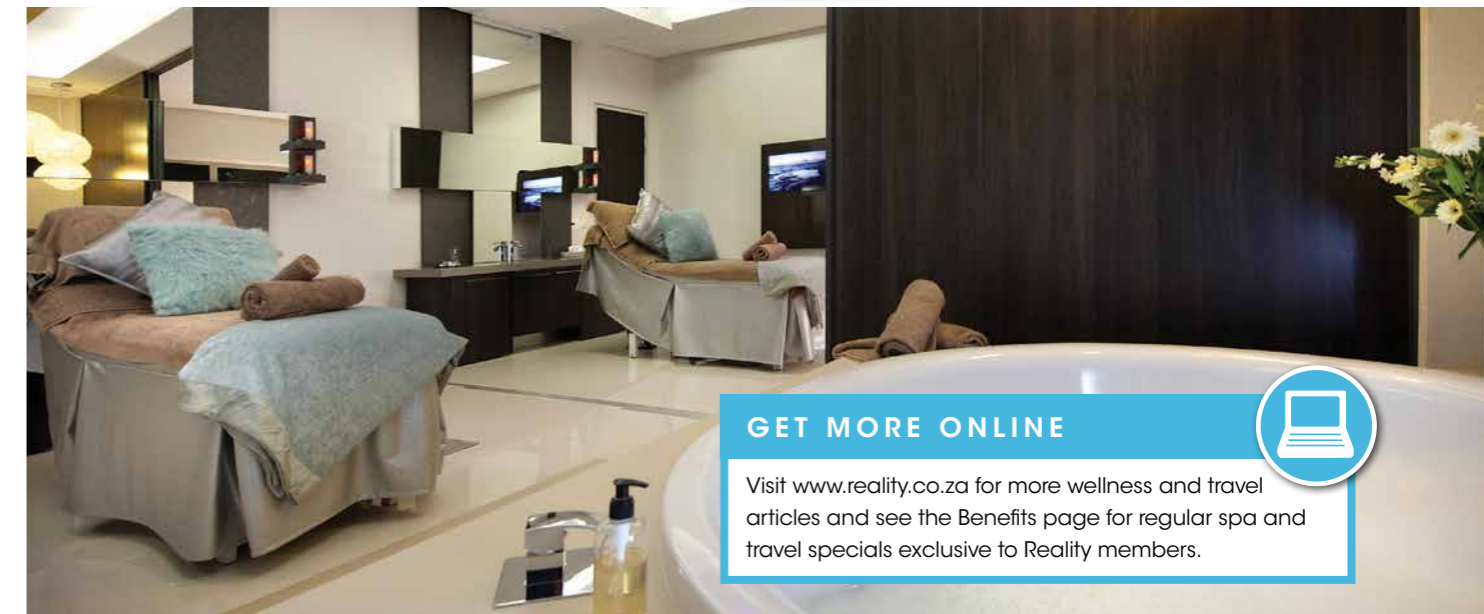
AFRICAN PRIDE CRYSTAL TOWERS SPECIAL

R1 028 a person (R2055 double, R1 725 single), including return shuttles to the CTICC, the V&A Waterfront, Table Mountain, Clifton and Camps Bay. Exclusive: Quote SANLAMMAG and get a complimentary sushi platter and a bottle of house wine. Valid until 30 September 2013. Minimum two-night stay, Friday to Sunday. Valid only at African Pride Crystal Towers Hotel & Spa.



NICK DALL

Nick Dall has lived in Italy, Argentina, Bolivia and Vietnam and has travelled round the world, usually avoiding health spas and creature comforts. See his work at www.nickdall.co.za.



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