



amta
american massage therapy association



WORKING IN A
SPA

AMTA CAREER SUCCESS SERIES

AMTA SPA OPERATIONAL COMMITTEE



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As the director of education for imassage, Inc., Eric provides continuing education focused on career longevity for massage schools, spas and professional organizations. He designs customized in-house training for some of the nation's top spas. Eric is an active member of AMTA and a frequent contributor to *Massage Magazine*. He secretly fantasizes about calling a residential spa home.



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WORKING IN A
SPA

WHAT TO EXPECT

You finished massage therapy school, passed your licensure exam with flying colors and are already exploring continuing education options to keep up-to-speed on the latest modalities. Or, maybe you've been practicing for several years and are just looking for a new work setting to apply your skills. No matter what level of experience you hold, you probably have some questions about which career path is right for you. Throughout this guide, you will find information and candid answers from spa employees and owners to help you determine if working in a spa setting could be the best option for you.

GETTING THE JOB

The Right Resume: A professional resume should always include your education, certifications, licensing credentials and any work experience related to the position for which you are applying. For a position in a spa, you will want to emphasize any experience you have that involves working with clients or in a customer service capacity. You will also want to highlight any special certifications you have and continuing education courses you have completed. Proofreading your resume for errors and typos is essential to securing any interview. Have a friend, colleague or mentor look over your resume to help ensure there are no errors or glaring omissions.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

> What Should You Wear? At the very least, you will want to wear attire that can be considered business casual. The easy fix is to be proactive by asking the interviewer, "Would you like me to provide a hands-on demonstration of my work?" If the answer is yes, then you should dress professionally, but comfortably. You'll want to present a professional image, but also allow for freedom of movement to provide the demonstration.

> Questions You Should Be Prepared to Answer: What are your strengths? **What areas would you describe as things you could improve, and what are you currently doing to work on those areas?** Describe a time you had to deal with a difficult client and explain how you handled it.

How many massages are you comfortable providing in a day? Where do you see yourself professionally in a year? Five years? Why do you want to work at this spa?

> Questions to Ask the Employer: What services does the spa provide, and what additional services will I be asked to perform? **What kind of training would be available to me? What is the culture like at this spa? How many other massage therapists are employed here? Will I be asked to meet a retail sales quota?**

You should also be prepared with a copy of your driver's license, massage license, proof of insurance and a list of three–five professional references.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Strong communication skills are required to be successful in the spa environment. You should be able to communicate effectively with your supervisor, fellow employees and, most importantly, your clients. Take advantage of the business and communication classes offered through AMTA, a local massage therapy school, or a nearby community college or university.

Before you begin working or as you become oriented with the environment, you will also want to become extremely familiar with the specific policies and procedures of the spa. You should be able to describe the services the spa offers and know which are within the scope of your practice. There is usually an expectation that you sell other products and services and you may even be

presented with sales goals.

Be prepared to understand the unique “philosophy of the spa,” or the culture and environment that the spa is providing its guests.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

One benefit of being a spa employee is that there is generally a support staff to take care of all of the basics, including scheduling and other business needs. Therefore, you can focus solely on massage and your clients, and not the paperwork and other factors that come into play when you are working as a sole practitioner. The spa will generally provide all of the supplies you need. And, working with a team of staff and other massage therapists can provide a sense of community and support.

The spa environment also provides you with the unique opportunity to diversify your expertise to include wraps, scrubs, and other services, depending on the rules and regulations of the state in which you are practicing. Coverage for these services may be available in your AMTA professional and general liability policy. Practicing and mastering different techniques is also one step toward a balanced self-care regimen.

SPA RHYTHM

“Spa Stamina” is one term used to describe the strategy that massage therapists can employ to prolong their careers and ultimately get the most fulfillment. The rhythm of work in a spa setting can be intense. You may find yourself with back-to-back appointments and with a short turn-around time. Unlike other settings, you usually aren’t able to set your

own appointment times and breaks between sessions. This kind of pace will require you to strategize about time management and self-care in order to be healthy and professionally fulfilled.

TYPES OF SPAS

The most common types of spas include day spas, resort/destination spas and medical-based spas.¹ Each kind of spa offers a variety of different services. The different types of spas give you the opportunity to diversify your skill set and gain a wide portfolio of experience. Another benefit is that the continually growing spa industry gives you more opportunities to move or relocate. If you’re working as a sole practitioner, picking up and starting over in a different city may not be the best option professionally. *Read more about different types of spas on page 10.*

CONTINUING EDUCATION OPTIONS

As the spa industry has grown, education options targeted specifically toward massage therapists working in spa settings have also increased. Many spas even offer on-site education programs as a way to augment their therapists’ skill sets and bolster employee retention and satisfaction. By attending programs on-site, you can save time and money.

And, there may be an opportunity to have your continuing education expenses paid for or reimbursed. Check out courses offered at the AMTA National Convention, AMTA’s Online CE Courses, and seminars offered through your local chapter or other industry organizations.

Questions to Consider:

Is being part of a team of other employees the right professional setting for me?

Will practicing with a support system of other massage therapists be beneficial to my work and career? How many clients am I comfortable seeing each day? Am I comfortable being asked to meet a sales quota?

Is expanding my knowledge and skills beyond traditional massage therapy practices important to me and my career?

WHAT'S EXPECTED OF YOU

What is the Spa looking for in you? Although your training and past professional experiences may have prepared you to practice in a variety of settings, landing a job within the spa industry may require some additional skills, education and qualifications you may not have anticipated. Below, read more about what makes working in a spa setting unique.

EDUCATION NEEDED

In 2013, massage therapists working in spa/salon settings reported having 656 hours of initial training.² In general, spa massage therapists are expected to have a basic massage therapy skill set, along with a professional attitude. It's important to consider the licensing rules for the state in which you desire to practice, too. Refer to AMTA's website for resources on licensing requirements for individual states.

In addition to your massage therapy skills and professional demeanor, the services offered in a spa may require you to continue your education even further. You may be required to gain additional skills or participate in training that will help you learn to sell products and understand the spa's procedures and philosophy. You may be asked to learn new techniques and will probably be required to practice the spa's signature treatments.

PERSONALITY TRAITS

The willingness to work as part of a team is a key quality that spa owners look for in potential employees. The very nature of serving guests lends itself to a team-like atmosphere. Spa massage therapists should be prepared to assist fellow employees in every department of the business—having a “team first” philosophy is crucial to the overall guest experience.

Learning to communicate effectively with fellow employees and direct management is imperative to the operational success of the spa. Often times, a spa director or owner is not a massage therapist—this is when advanced communications skills come into play.

You will also want to have a keen

awareness of the spa's specific “brand.”

Depending on the spa, you may be asked to reflect that brand in your attitude, appearance and etiquette.

SALES ROLE

Expect to be trained or asked to sell products specific to the spa. It is common for spas or their vendors to provide training to new employees based on products used in the spa. Rather than feeling like a “salesperson,” you can view this as an opportunity to educate your clients on the products and techniques you are using and the specific benefits that each product and service has to offer. This approach empowers your client to make an informed decision on the recommended products or services. Your communication skills and extensive knowledge of massage therapy and the related products can help you transition into this role.

SCHEDULE EXPECTATIONS

It is common for turnover times between services to be shorter than massage therapists are accustomed to—sometimes, just 10 minutes. Spas also tend to be busiest on weekends, which may or may not be a drawback for you depending on the kind of work schedule you prefer.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many massage therapists have wondered, is it ethical to promote my personal business while working and being compensated by another business? Some spa owners may not see it as a conflict while others have a “no compete clause” or other agreements. Be sure to check your employment agreement.



Questions to Consider:

Do I fit the general requirements that spa owners and directors are looking for in employees? **Am I comfortable with another staff member scheduling my appointments and setting my break times?** At this point in my career, would exposure to new clients and different expectations help me to reach my overall career goals?

BENEFITS & WAGES

AVERAGE INDUSTRY WAGES

On average, massage therapists working in spa settings earn \$51.58 per hour. That figure includes a \$39.01 average hourly rate and an average tip of \$12.57.²

SETTING	AVERAGE HOURLY PAY (excluding tips) ¹
Sole Practitioner	54.55
Spa/Salon Setting	34.75
Health Club/Athletic Facility	42.50
Hospital/Medical Office	35.48
Chiropractic Office/ Integrated Clinic	33.11



GRATUITIES

Tips for massage therapists working in spa/salon settings are among the most generous—\$12.57 on average, compared to \$11.85 for massage therapists working in other settings. They also receive tips the most often, while massage therapists working in health care settings and as sole practitioners receive tips the least often.² Gratuities should be graciously appreciated, but never expected.

BENEFITS

Some spas offer their full-time employees a benefits package. These packages can include health insurance and paid vacation and sick time. In 2013, 35 percent of massage therapists reported receiving health benefits from their employers. Some spas may also offer employees discounts on their products and/or services.

YOUR EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Depending on the spa, you may be hired as an employee of the business while other spas are going to prefer you work as an independent contractor. There are pros and cons to both. There is no single definition of who qualifies as an independent contractor. Instead, the determination is made on a case-by-case basis. For federal taxes, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) applies a 20-part test, looking at factors that help establish whether the independent contractor or the business owner has control over the work. Labor officials in many states look at those 20 factors. This 20-part test is one way—but not the only way—the IRS and many state agencies try to determine who controls the work. Some factors include how the employee receives instructions from the business regarding when, where and how to perform the work; how the training is provided; and which party sets the hours of work. Fines and back taxes owed when a worker is misclassified can be significant.³

Since classification standards can change, you may want to consult an accountant or business attorney for more information. The National Federation of Independent Business (www.nfib.com) is another good resource. Be sure to also research which option—working as an employee or a contractor—works best for you and your current and future career goals.



CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

A diversified skill-set, strong communications background and a well-documented work history can help open many doors for you.

Some massage therapists have moved on to open their own practices and even run or manage their own spas. They use the business savvy, time management skills and communication tools they developed while working within a spa setting to more effectively manage their own businesses. There also may be an opportunity to grow into a management role at the spa where you are working.

Others learn that concentrating on a specific condition or modality is the most rewarding career move for them. Through seeing a diverse set of clients, these therapists are able to find their niche and progress within the profession. According to the AMTA Industry Survey, massage therapists continue to move toward increased specialization.

And, by working in the various types of spas, you can learn how to manage and meet different expectations held by the different spas. Strong teamwork skills and the ability to be flexible will help you shine in any work environment. No matter which direction you decide to pursue, your time spent practicing within any type of spa setting can have a positive impact on future job prospects.

Questions to Consider:

What is my ultimate career goal in the massage therapy profession? **Does working as a spa employee or an independent contractor fit better with my current and future goals?** Have I discovered a specific condition or modality that I am passionate about exploring further? **Am I utilizing all of the career resources available to me, including my professional connections and my massage school's career center?**

EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK

OUTLOOK FOR THE MESSAGE THERAPY PROFESSION

Employment opportunities are expected to grow for massage therapists. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Labor information, **employment opportunities for massage therapists are expected to grow at a faster than average rate** as more people become interested in alternative medicine and holistic healing. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, it is estimated that between 2010 and 2020 massage therapists are likely to see a 20 percent increase in job opportunities as more people learn about the benefits of massage therapy.⁴

THE SPA INDUSTRY & MASSAGE THERAPY

Spas are where most people continue to receive massage, with 21 percent of those surveyed in July 2013 saying they received their most recent massage at a spa.⁵ And, according to the International Spa Association (ISPA), massage is still the number one spa treatment that people seek out worldwide.¹ What's more, **consumers are also increasingly seeking massage for stress reduction and relaxation** according to the 2013 consumer survey. Twenty-seven percent of adult Americans said they had at least one massage in the last five years. And, 32 percent of massage consumers reported getting a massage for relaxation and to alleviate stress in 2013. This trend continues to benefit the spa industry, as relaxation and stress-reduction are viewed

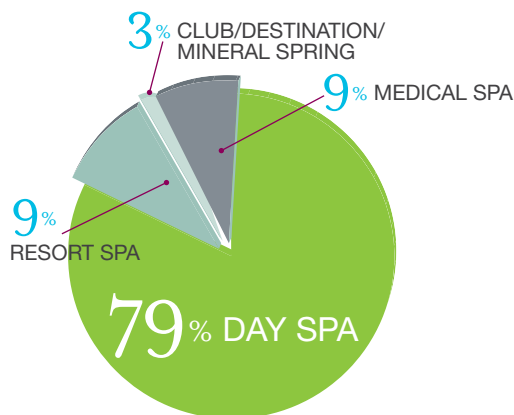
as key drivers for spa visits. Spas that are considered medical-based or specialize in therapeutic services benefit from the fact that massage is used more than ever for medical/health reasons—43 percent of massage consumers got a massage for medical and health reasons in 2013. Eighty-eight percent of Americans agree that massage can be effective in reducing pain.⁵

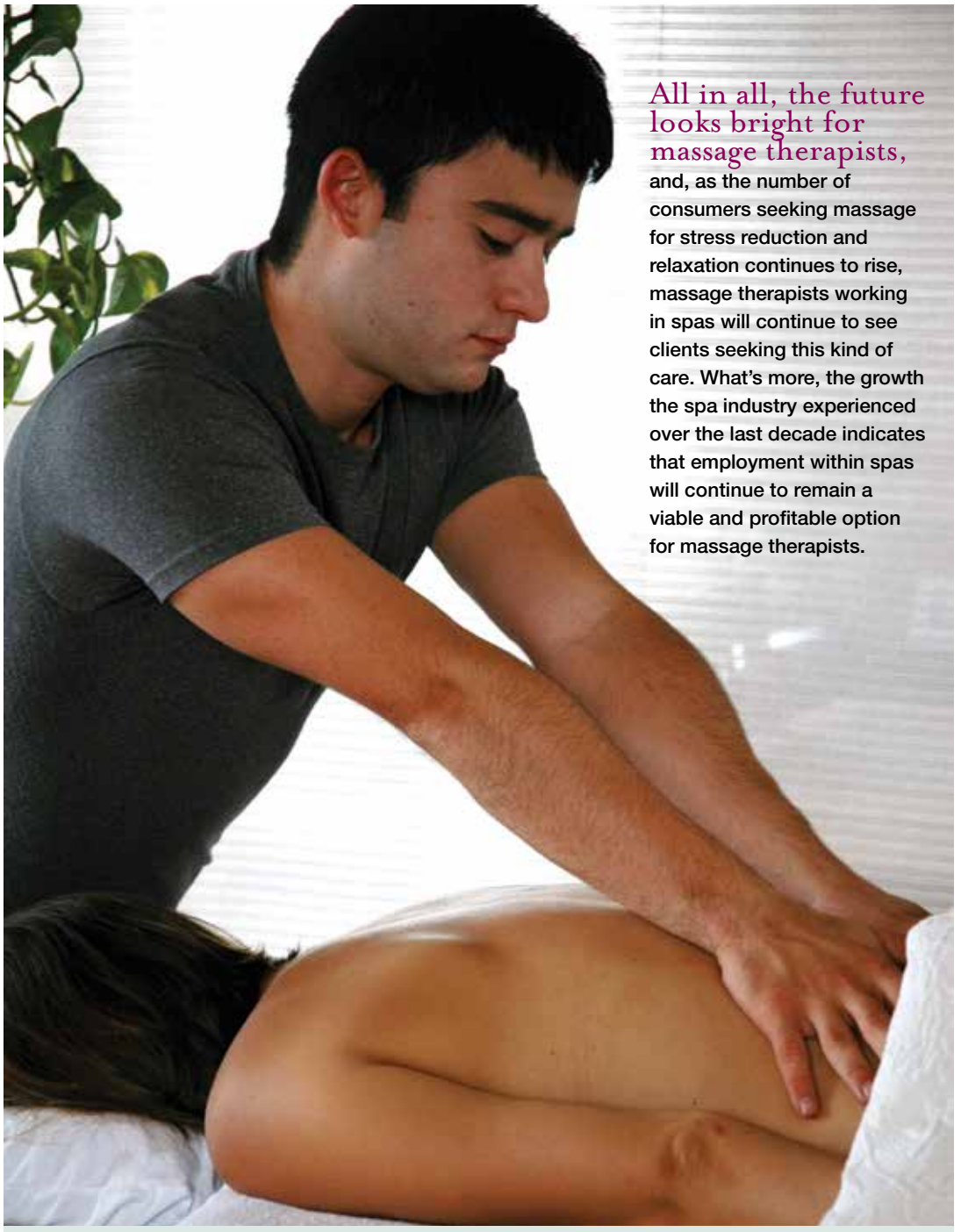
TYPES OF SPAS

According to the *ISPA 2013 U.S. Spa Industry Update*, there are 19,960 spa establishments in the U.S. Of these establishments, 79 percent are classified as day spas, nine percent are defined as resort spas and nine percent fall into the category of medical spas.¹

GROWTH AND TRENDS

From 2011 to 2012, the number of spas grew by .05 percent, reversing a slight decline that began in 2009. Previous to 2008, the number of spas in the U.S. had grown by more than 300 percent—from 4,557 in 1998 to 21,300 in 2008.¹





All in all, the future looks bright for massage therapists, and, as the number of consumers seeking massage for stress reduction and relaxation continues to rise, massage therapists working in spas will continue to see clients seeking this kind of care. What's more, the growth the spa industry experienced over the last decade indicates that employment within spas will continue to remain a viable and profitable option for massage therapists.

MASSAGE THERAPY CONSUMER TRENDS:

TOUCHING MORE CONSUMERS: Massage has increased from an estimated 8 percent of the U.S. adult population receiving massage in 1997 to **16 percent in 2013**.

SEEING THE RESULTS: 88 percent of consumers see massage as effective in reducing pain, and 88 percent believe massage can be beneficial to overall health and wellness .⁵

MASSAGE ACCEPTANCE GROWING: Research shows that 65 percent of consumers have or would recommend massage therapy to a relative or friend.⁵

IN THEIR WORDS

PROFILE OF A MESSAGE THERAPIST

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, Scott Lesieur was employed in a non-massage therapy job when his employer decided to down-size and eliminate his position. After enrolling in massage school, Scott started working part time for a local spa while he completed his studies. He has now been at that spa for nine years, where he has worked as a trainer, lead therapist and now a supervisor.

Q. WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE BEGINNING YOUR CAREER AS A MESSAGE THERAPIST, AND BEFORE WORKING IN A SPA?

A. The more business knowledge you have, the better, and the more diverse modalities you know, the more value you bring to your position. However, when you are working in someone else's business, then they probably have a specific way that they want you to perform a modality. You have to be open to collaborating with your employer and following their protocol. In turn, when you are self-employed, you have more freedom to use all of your training and combine different skills when working with a client.

Q. WHAT IS A TYPICAL WORK WEEK LIKE FOR YOU?

A. I work four days per week and I set my own schedule. So, I generally do 25 – 32 hours of massage therapy per week and complete my other duties in between sessions or after my shift. I like this routine because I always have something to do. With the size of the spa and the diversity of the clients and services offered, I never get bored. I'll do reflexology, a couple of stone treatments, deep tissue massage, pregnancy massage and other services in any given week. And, I work with at least one person per week who is a first-timer. Also, many of the clients are only at the spa for that day—

this gives me the opportunity to continue the treatment they are already receiving, or offer them something new. It keeps me on my toes.

Q. WHAT UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS AND TRAITS ARE CRUCIAL TO BEING SUCCESSFUL WITHIN A SPA SETTING?

A. Developing good time management skills is key, in addition to having the willingness to work in a team environment. Communication skills are also crucial. You need to be able to ask the right questions up-front, and then listen to how clients describe existing conditions or specific ailments in order to create the best experience possible.

Q. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF WORKING WITHIN A SPA? WHAT HAVE SOME OF THE DRAWBACKS BEEN?

A. I find that I really benefit from being part of a team dynamic. And, not having to deal with phones, budgeting, laundry, supplies and invoicing clients creates a much less stressful environment. I also often work with clients who are on vacation or celebrating special occasions.

One drawback is the time constraints you face in a spa environment. For example, if a client needs more time, I usually can't go over the allotted time for the session. There can also be "office politics" and you need to learn how to navigate around those in order to be successful.

Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER OTHERS PURSUING A CAREER IN THIS INDUSTRY?

A. I would recommend checking out the spa as a client first. Take note of how the therapists dress and their demeanor. Study the services that the spa offers. Ask yourself, "does this fit with the direction I want to take my career?"

PROFILE OF A SPA DIRECTOR

SERAPHINA L. ASHE IS THE EXECUTIVE SPA DIRECTOR at Glen Ivy Spa in California. Below, Seraphina answered some questions on what she looks for in a potential massage therapist. While meeting the spa's general education and certification requirements are non-negotiable, Seraphina also stresses the importance of demonstrating a passion for the profession.

Q. WHAT KINDS OF TRAITS, BACKGROUNDS AND SKILLS DO YOU LOOK FOR IN POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES?

A. At Glen Ivy, we require a minimum of 500 hours of education. All full- and part-time massage therapists must be NCBTMB certified. In addition to these requirements, we look for therapists who show their commitment and dedication to the profession by continuing their education, participating in professional organizations and attending industry conferences. We really strive to attract massage therapists who have a genuine curiosity about different modalities and techniques and who are always striving to further their knowledge.

Q. WHAT TYPES OF QUESTIONS SHOULD MASSAGE THERAPISTS BE PREPARED TO ANSWER AND/OR DEMONSTRATE DURING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS?

A. Each massage therapist should be prepared to perform a massage. The practical portion of the interview should demonstrate who the applicant is as a therapist. In short, they should be able to express their approach to massage, as well as their knowledge and technical skill. During the verbal interview, the applicant should be able to adequately express their passion for the profession and their future goals.

Q. WHAT KINDS OF UNIQUE EXPERIENCES OR SKILLS MIGHT GIVE A MASSAGE THERAPIST AN ADVANTAGE OVER ANOTHER CANDIDATE?

A. Taking the time to seek out continuing education opportunities and being involved in the massage therapy community are definite pluses.

Q. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK WILL BE LIKE FOR MASSAGE THERAPISTS LOOKING TO BEGIN A CAREER WITHIN A SPA SETTING WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR? THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

A. I think the prospects for massage therapists looking for employment in a spa setting are very good. While it is true that the economy has had a negative impact on some luxury spas, there are still ample opportunities for massage therapists in other types of spas. Massage therapists who consistently pursue continuing education and present themselves in a positive, professional manner will find opportunities, regardless of the state of the economy. I am always willing to hire a competent, dedicated therapist, no matter the current state of the business—an outstanding therapist will generate business!

Q. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS MASSAGE THERAPISTS WILL FIND WORKING IN A SPA, IN CONTRAST TO OTHER WORK SETTINGS?

A. Generally speaking, massage therapists working in a spa setting will enjoy employee benefits that include health insurance, a steady income and the camaraderie that comes with working as part of a team

Q. WHAT OVERALL TRENDS DO YOU THINK ARE IMPACTING THE SPA INDUSTRY RIGHT NOW?

A. The trend is returning to authentic, simplistic and heartfelt services. Again, a well-trained, dedicated and passionate massage therapist simply doing what they love is the best service any spa could offer!

RESOURCES

AMTA ONLINE CAREER GUIDANCE

Whether you are a seasoned massage therapist or just starting your career, AMTA's Online Career Guidance section offers a wealth of resources to expand or jump start your career—including a special section for massage therapists choosing to work in spa settings, a career path assessment quiz and other installments of the *AMTA Career Success Series*.

amtamassage.org/CareerGuidance



ONLINE COURSES

AMTA's online courses are a convenient way to earn your CEs and enhance your knowledge in the areas of business, ethics, various massage modalities, client populations and self-care. More than 50 courses are currently available.

amtamassage.org/learn



AMTA NATIONAL CONVENTION

Network with colleagues and advance your skill set at this annual event. Access 35 continuing education courses focusing on hands-on learning as well as the business-side of the profession. amtamassage.org/education

AMTA JOB BANK:

Visit AMTA's Job Bank to search for massage therapy jobs, or post your resume online to gain exposure to potential employers. amtamassage.org/jobbank



AMTA'S MENTORING PROGRAM:

Improve your communication skills, make connections and set future goals through AMTA's Mentoring Program.

amtamassage.org/mentoring

LOOKING AHEAD & MANAGING YOUR CAREER

It's always important to be thinking ahead about your ultimate career goals in the massage therapy profession. If you're still unsure about which path is best for you, gaining some exposure to different work settings is always a good idea. If you're an AMTA member, you can leverage connections you've made through your chapter or other events. Set up a few informational interviews with fellow members who have worked in a spa setting and find out what they enjoyed about the work and what they found the most challenging. Sometimes, a face-to-face conversation is the easiest way to get a grasp on what you can expect at a particular business or setting. What's more, having a mentor to bounce ideas off can be extremely beneficial when you are faced with important career choices.

AMTA's vast community of massage therapists is a great place to begin making the connections that can help you progress and flourish in your career as a massage therapist!

Spas are where most people continue to receive massage, with **21%** of those surveyed saying they received their last massage at a spa.



SOURCES

1. *ISPA 2013 U.S. Spa Industry Update*
2. *2013 AMTA Industry Survey*
3. Simmons, C. (2009, Spring). Classified Information. *Massage Therapy Journal*, 43–45.
4. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*
5. Data compiled from *AMTA Consumer Surveys*

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ABOUT THE AMERICAN MASSAGE THERAPY ASSOCIATION

The American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) represents more than 56,000 massage therapists. AMTA works to establish massage therapy as integral to the maintenance of good health and complementary to other therapeutic processes and to advance the profession through ethics and standards, continuing education, professional publications, legislative efforts, public education, and fostering the development of members.

More information/ join:
amtamassage.org



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