

# Ssshhhhh!

## Why Spas are Silencing Our Digital Addiction

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### Riiing! Buzzz! Click! Beep! Screeeech!

The sounds of our modern world are harsh. The constant jarring noise of technology and the stress that comes with it is something people are constantly fighting through daily.

According to the American Psychological Association's ongoing study *Stress in America*, more than four out of five adults in the U.S. (86 percent) report that they constantly or often check their email, texts and social media accounts. The survey also found that stress levels run higher in the individuals that report the high consistency of daily technology use.

"Technology has brought us many great advances," said Jeremy McCarthy, Group Director of Spa and Wellness at Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, which recently launched a Global Digital Detox Initiative in all its spas worldwide. "But the expectations for instant communication and the increasing pace of change in the world can have a negative impact on our wellbeing."

Requiring guests to unplug at the spa gives them permission to stop the noise and truly destress.



### Why Your Guests Should Unplug

The same survey by the APA found that almost two-thirds of Americans (65 percent) somewhat or strongly agree that periodically “unplugging” or taking a “digital detox” is important for their mental health. Spa customers are already at an advantage because they are aware that the spa helps them unwind from the stress of their daily lives. They are already searching for an oasis, so it’s the spa’s responsibility to give it to them.

“You might say that old adage that ‘silence is golden’ takes on a special spa meaning here at Sundara,” says Chris Scheel, general manager at Sundara Inn & Spa in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin. “Guests find that, when the distractions of the real world are set aside, they can focus in earnest on their own wellness and the health of their relationships. Some use it as quality time to heal from a loss, others embrace it as a way to come to a major life decision. Each guest benefits from it in their own unique way.”

Barry Shingle, director of guest relations and programming at Rancho La Puerta in Tecate, Mexico, agrees by adding, “Happiness is found in the present moment. It is almost impos-

sible to be present when digitally connected. By being quiet and with yourself you can discover who you are, otherwise we are just reacting to distractions and what’s on the outside.”

### Unplugging Anxieties

You know that AMA report? Interestingly, even though the report found that 65 percent agree that a periodic digital detox will benefit them, only 28 percent of those who say this actually report doing so.

It can be scary to put away our connection to the world. People have become addicted to the buzz of their phones. They’re afraid if they miss a text or email or fail to like a post on Facebook, their world will fall apart. Even though we know this to be untrue, our anxieties feel differently, which can make forced unplugging feel like torture.

“It is difficult for our guests to digitally disconnect,” notes Shingle. “In theory, most of them think it is a good idea, but technology addiction is powerful.”

If guests are getting anxious and more stressed from being away from their devices, the relaxing treatments they’ve come to the spa for will be ineffective. You don’t want your guests to

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— JEREMY MCCARTHY, Group Director of Spa and Wellness at Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group

The lounges at Fusion Spa are a place for guests to completely unwind.



be wondering what they're missing; you want them to remain present in their treatment.

### Encouraging Guests to Disconnect

It takes some education and encouragement to ween people off their phones. Forcing the spa-goer to drop their phone in a basket at the reception desk is not going to put their mind at ease. It's important to educate each guest on the benefits they'll gain from putting their device away.

"When I escort new guests to our communal bathing

experience, I tell them I am giving them the best gift I could for the next couple of hours: I am allowing them to turn off all cellular devices and not respond for now," notes Kathy Nelson, spa director at Kabuki Springs & Spa in San Francisco, California. "I try to make it really positive rather than a 'no cell phones' harsh enforcement concept. We also have signs inside every locker and at the front desk that say, 'Power down; you and all electronics. Relaxation in progress.'"

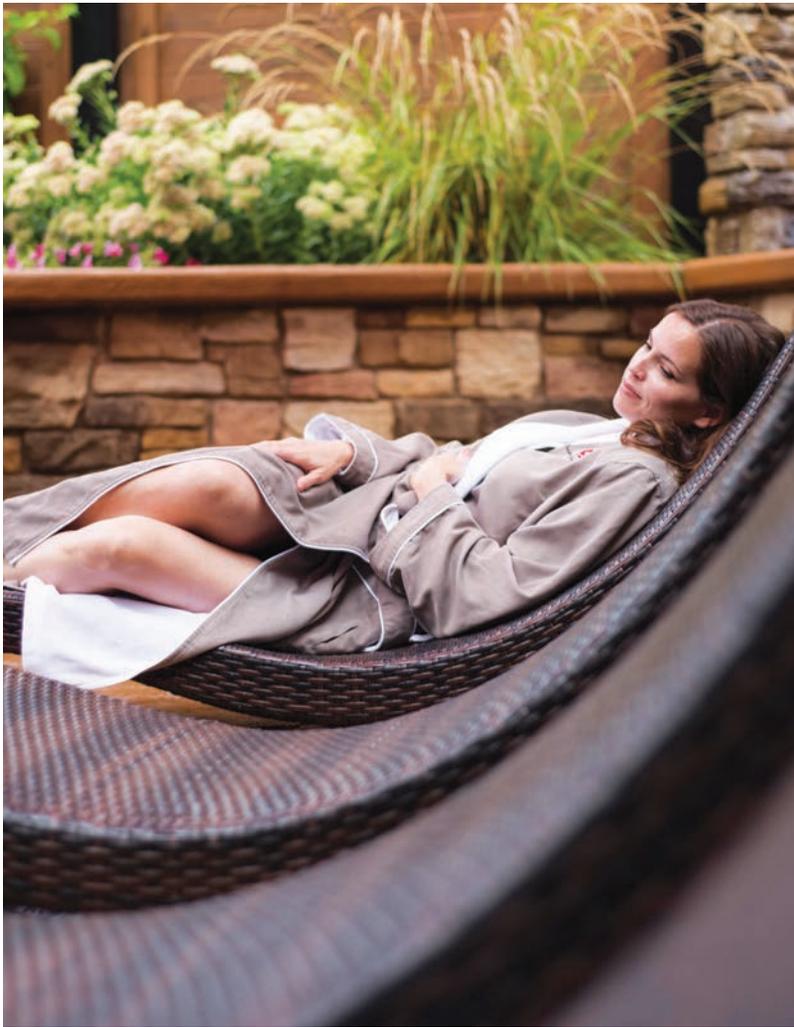
Subtle reminders like Nelson's allow guests to know the benefits of losing the phone without feeling like their being



Mindful walks throughout the property at Rancho La Puerta allow guests to unwind and reconnect with nature.

"We remind guests that not that long ago, life existed without constant digital connection. We encourage our guests to take baby steps by going one day at a time without digitally connecting to their devices."

— BARRY SHINGLE, Group Director of Guest Relations and Programming at Rancho la Puerta



Sundara's Conversation-Free Tranquility Garden allows guests to reconnect with their own thoughts.

forced into something. Her tactics also rely heavily on staff engagement. "I try to train the staff to communicate to our guests that this is a gift, not a punishment."

Allowing one area to remain openly cell phone friendly, can make it obvious to guests that they're not allowed elsewhere in the spa. At Fusions Spa & Wellness in Sylva, North Carolina, co-owner Jeanine Sowers has found that setting up charging stations in the locker rooms along with signage saying phones aren't allowed elsewhere in the spa allows the spa to remain sensitive to guests' technology needs, while still enforcing a silent spa experience.

Mandarin Oriental's digital detox initiative encourages guests to surrender their phones upon entering the spa. To combat the urge to seek out their phones, Mandarin's spas provide a full range of mindfulness activities such as journaling, note card writing, coloring, and meditation to help guests unwind and forget about their devices.

Idle hands and minds will be the first to reach for their phones, so this tactic of keeping guests busy has become

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— CHRIS SCHEEL, General Manager at Sundara Inn & Spa

popular. Says Shingle, "Most guests have cell phone reception on property, so we provide as many opportunities to see what it feels like to not be digitally connected, even if just for a few hours a day. We remind guests that not that long ago, life existed without constant digital connection. We encourage our guests to take baby steps by going one day at a time without digitally connecting to their devices. At The Ranch each day is packed with activities; from hikes to fitness classes to spa treatments. Many guests find that there is so much to do—whether socializing with new friends, curling up with a good book in a hammock, or learning a new pose in a yoga class—that with each passing day it gets easier to remain unplugged."

### Marketing Your Digital Detox

As more and more spa-goers get used to the idea of unwinding from their digital lives at the spa, it's important to market your silent offerings and show guests the positive experience they'll gain from opting out of technology for a day—or longer—at the spa.

"We have a 'Peace & Quiet Policy' that speaks to our mission to be a 'sanctuary from stress,'" says Scheel. "We tell this story through social media and in all our marketing and PR materials." Sundara Inn & Spa has also recently added "unplug" pouches for storing electronics and "unplug" tee shirts for purchase in the boutique to promote their mission as well as spread the message even further.

Fusions Spa & Wellness chooses to inform guests of their silent policies before they even book an appointment. "Our website and brochure mention that we are an unplugged facility," says Sowers. "It is in all caps and bold font in our membership agreement, and we have recently required an "I am



"Unplug" pouches are available to Sundara guests to remind them to put away their devices.

The communal baths at Kabuki Springs are a no-phone zone to ensure guest privacy.



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unplugging" agreement to be signed and agreed to when arriving for an appointment." These measures allow guests the knowledge upfront that when booking an appointment, they'll be fully immersed in a digital detox.

And that's what guests are seeking when they come to the spa: a detox for their body and mind. The spa is a chance to relax, refresh, and renew, and by offering the chance to forget about all the buzzes and beeps that come with modern technology, you're giving them an experience that can't be

experienced anywhere else. Implementing a policy that encourages guests to unplug helps allows them the opportunity to find the peace and serenity they're looking for in the spa. ■



**ARE YOU** having trouble learning to unplug? Head to [pulse.experienceispa.com](http://pulse.experienceispa.com) to learn about the new app that turns unplugging from your phone into a game.

**FEATURED SOURCES**



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