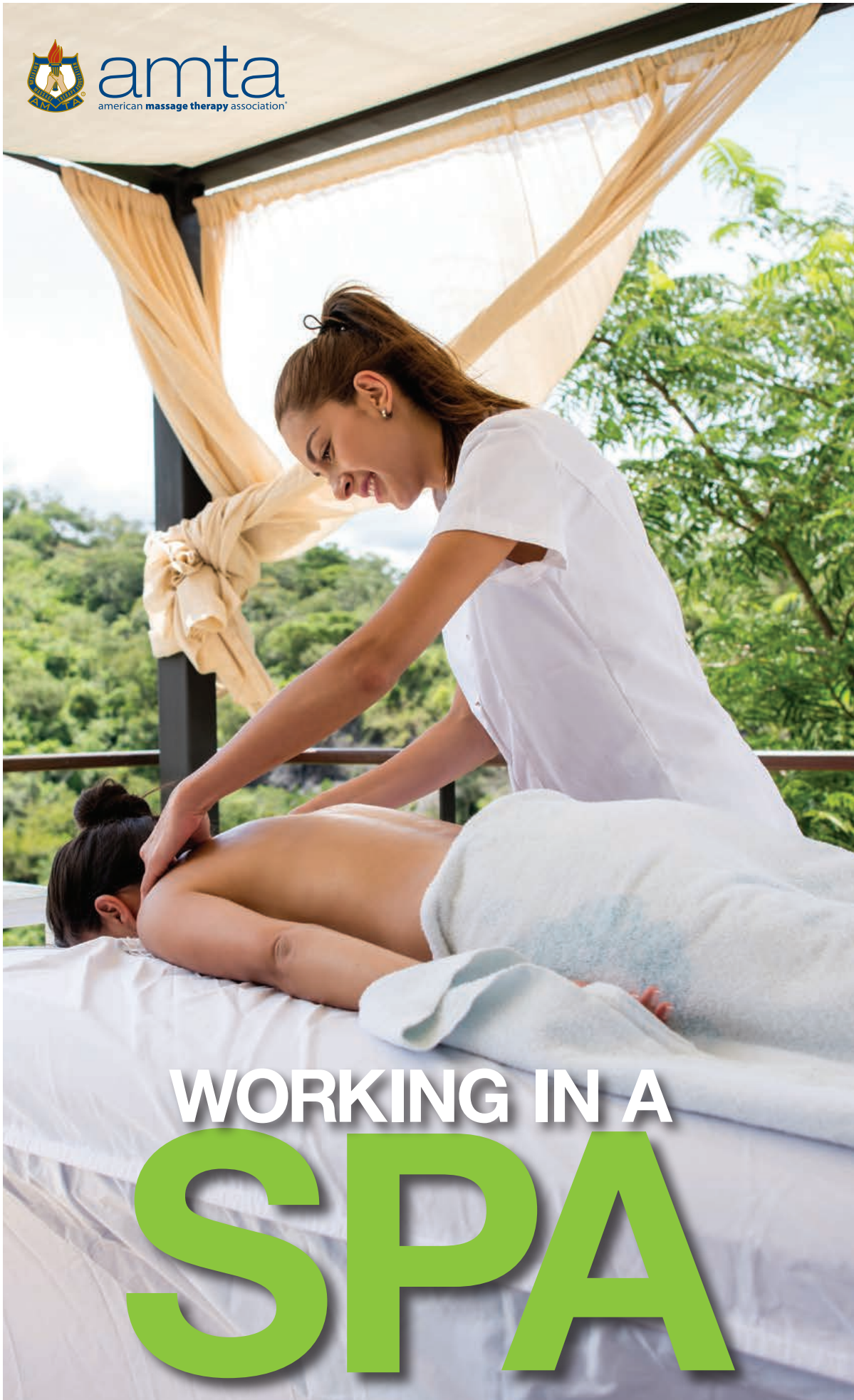




amta
american **massage therapy** association



WORKING IN A
SPA

AMTA CAREER SUCCESS SERIES

contents

WHAT TO EXPECT IN A SPA ENVIRONMENT 4

WHAT'S EXPECTED OF YOU 6

BENEFITS & WAGES 8

EXPLORING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES 9

EMPLOYMENT & INDUSTRY OUTLOOK 10

THE POWER OF PREVENTION:
SELF-CARE IN THE SPA SETTING 12

MORE RESOURCES 14



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 techniques. 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 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 and 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.

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 2018, the average amount of initial training held by massage therapists was 667 hours. 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 \$54.27 per hour. That figure includes a \$39.57 average hourly rate and an average tip of \$14.70.²

SETTING	AVERAGE HOURLY PAY (excluding tips) ¹
Spa/Salon Setting	39.57
Health Club/Athletic Facility	49.65
Hospital/Medical Office	43.62
Chiropractic Office/ Integrated Clinic	39.81



GRATUITIES

Tips for massage therapists working in spa/salon settings are among the most generous—\$14.70 on average, compared to \$12.30 for massage therapists working in other settings. 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 2018, 45 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 technique 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.

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 technique 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 MASSAGE 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 integrative medicine and holistic healing. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, it is estimated that between 2018 and 2028 employment for massage therapists is projected to increase 22 percent, much faster than the average.⁴

THE SPA INDUSTRY & MASSAGE THERAPY

Spas are where most people continue to receive massage, with 22 percent of those surveyed in July 2019 saying they received their most recent massage at a spa.⁵

What's more, consumers are also increasingly seeking massage for stress reduction and relaxation according to the 2019 consumer survey. Thirty percent of adult Americans said they had a massage at a spa in the last 12 months. And, **26 percent of massage consumers reported getting a massage for relaxation and to alleviate stress in 2019**. 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

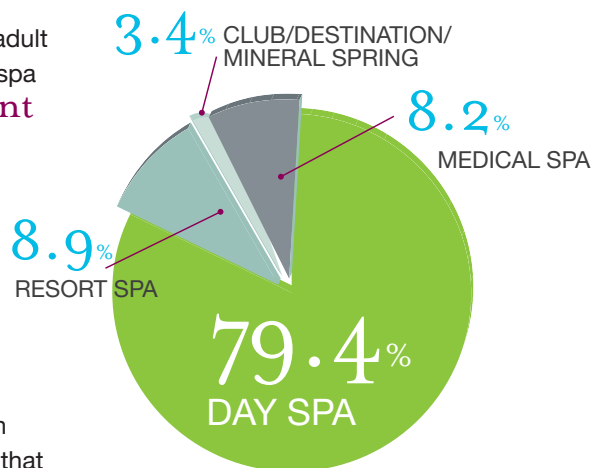
massage is used more than ever for medical/health reasons—52 percent of massage consumers got a massage for medical and health reasons in 2019. Eighty-seven percent of Americans agree that massage can be effective in reducing pain.⁵

TYPES OF SPAS

According to the *ISPA 2018 U.S. Spa Industry Update*, there are 22,160 spa establishments in the U.S.

GROWTH AND TRENDS

From 2017 to 2018, the number of spas grew by 1.7 percent, continuing a trend in growth that started in 2012. 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 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 **21 percent in 2019**.

SEEING THE RESULTS: 87 percent of consumers see massage as effective in reducing pain, and 86 percent believe massage can be beneficial to overall health and wellness.⁵

MASSAGE ACCEPTANCE GROWING: Research shows that 71 percent of consumers have or would recommend massage therapy to a relative or friend.⁵

THE POWER OF PREVENTION: SELF-CARE IN THE SPA SETTING

A sound self-care strategy is necessary for career longevity—no matter the work setting. Taking care of yourself needs to be at the top of your priority list.

BODY MECHANICS

Developing an awareness of good body mechanics early in your practice can be key to successfully maintaining an injury-free, long-term massage therapy career. Cultivate the habit of being aware of your body mechanics at all times. With proper body mechanics, you will be better equipped to effectively address your clients' needs without sacrificing those of your own body.

Use your body:

- efficiently
- to produce the most effective movement
- with the least amount of effort

BE AWARE OF OVERUSE INJURY

Overuse syndrome is also called cumulative trauma disorder (CTD) or repetitive strain injury (RSI). It is a condition characterized by chronic irritation to any body part, most commonly the thumb, the wrist and the elbow. Symptoms may also include tenderness, tightness and/or soreness in the forearm, elbow and/or shoulder.

To reduce the likelihood of overuse syndrome:

- monitor the number of sessions you offer per week
- work out regularly to maintain strength
- monitor your body mechanics

CONTROL YOUR MASSAGE SESSIONS

Stay focused on keeping your center in the midst of what can sometimes be a whirlwind of activity. Schedule your sessions, if possible, with sufficient time between clients to stretch, breathe, hydrate and relax. This will allow your muscles, mind and spirit to refresh and rejuvenate.

For your sessions:

- focus on good body mechanics
- keep your table at the proper height
- wear comfortable clothing and shoes with proper support

PROTECT YOUR HANDS

Use a variety of techniques in your massage, as doing so can cut down on the amount of intensive hands-on work you do in each massage session. You can also help to protect your hands by modifying the way you use them. For example, use a thumb-over-thumb or side-by-side thumb technique at the sub occipital ridge.

Additionally, try using your forearms to give your wrist and hands a break. Your forearm is a useful tool for broader surfaces:

- utilize the soft, fleshy part of your forearm or the ulnar surface
- apply force closest to your elbow rather than near your wrist
- keep your wrist and hand relaxed when utilizing your forearm
- use the forearm moving in a proximal or distal direction





AMTA IS HERE TO SUPPORT YOU IN EVERY STAGE OF YOUR CAREER

AMTA RESOURCES

Whether you are a seasoned massage therapist or just starting your career, AMTA Resources section offers a wealth of guidance 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 Guides*.

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 80 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/convention

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 **22%** of those surveyed saying they received their last massage at a spa.



SOURCES

1. *ISPA 2019 U.S. Spa Industry Update*
2. *2019 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, the most respected name in massage therapy, is the largest non-profit, professional association serving massage therapists, massage students and massage schools. The association is directed by volunteer leadership and fosters ongoing, direct member-involvement through its 51 chapters. AMTA works to advance the profession through ethics and standards, the promotion of fair and consistent licensing of massage therapists in all states, and public education on the benefits of massage.

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