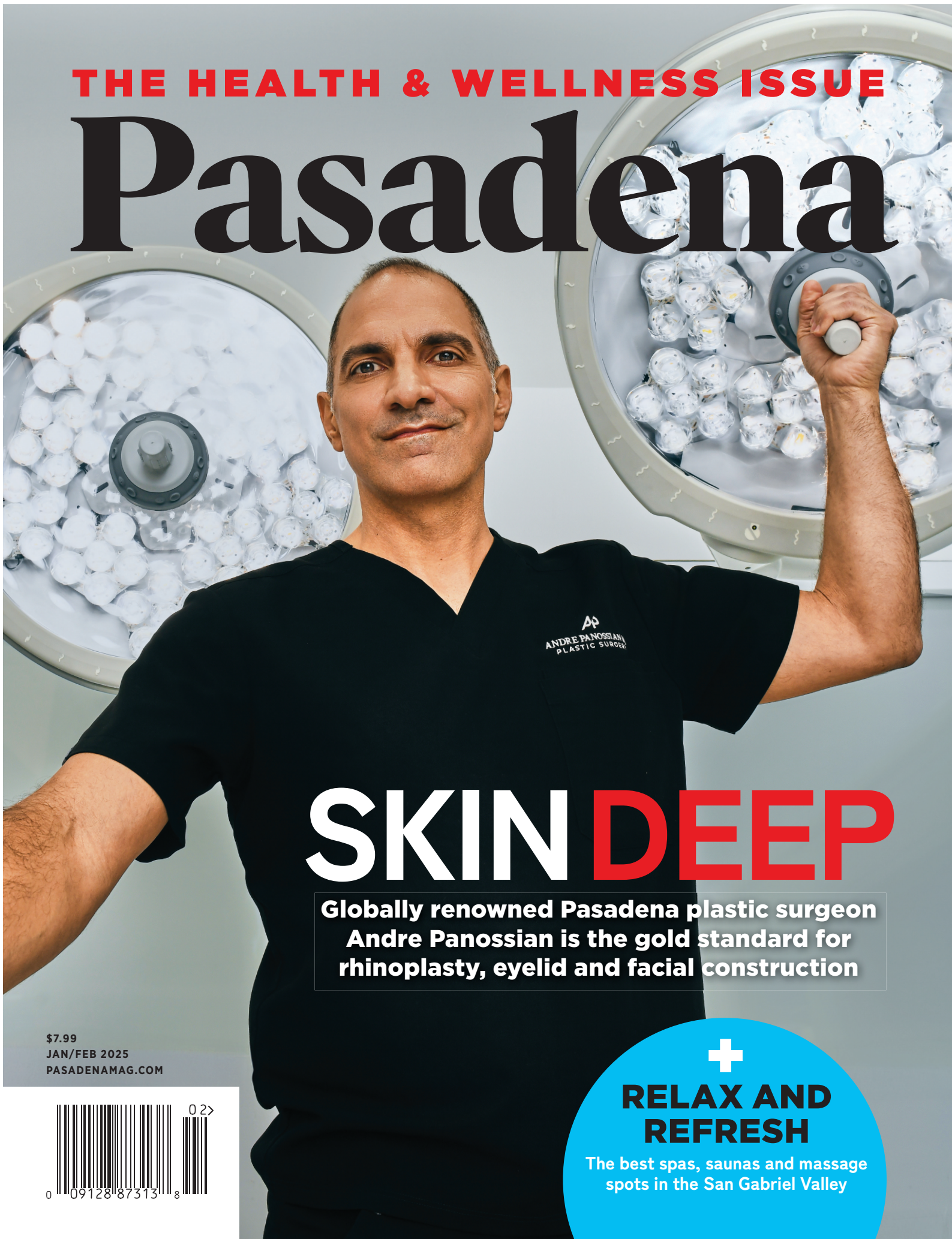


**THE HEALTH & WELLNESS ISSUE**

# Pasadena



## SKIN DEEP

**Globally renowned Pasadena plastic surgeon  
Andre Panossian is the gold standard for  
rhinoplasty, eyelid and facial construction**

\$7.99  
JAN/FEB 2025  
PASADENAMAG.COM



**RELAX AND  
REFRESH**

The best spas, saunas and massage spots in the San Gabriel Valley

# A (Restorative) Quickie in Cancun

Five Days at the Grand Hyatt Resort in Playa del Carmen, Mexico

BY MEREDITH MARAN



**W**

hen I was invited to visit and write about the wellness program at the Grand Hyatt Resort in Playa del Carmen,

Mexico, I asked only two questions. “Did you say ‘wellness?’” And, “Can I bring my partner, please?”

Denise and I were so overdue. Three years earlier, Denise (who uses they/them pronouns) had suffered a traumatic brain injury in a bike accident; we’d been living with their uncertain prognosis ever since. In case we weren’t having enough fun, in early 2024, Denise

needed not one but two knee surgeries. Shortly after we purged the unsexy medical equipment from the conjugal bedroom, an injury knocked me out of



commission for three months, resulting in a total hip replacement. In August 2024, when Denise and I could both frolic again, we went out for a celebratory dinner with friends—and came home with Covid.

There is a God: the Hyatt said ‘yes.’ Following our five-hour flight from LAX to Cancun, and a 40-minute hotel shuttle ride past scores of imposing luxury resort gateways interspersed with funky auto body shops and abandoned fruit stands, we were greeted by the friendliest hotel staff I’ve yet encountered offering an embarrassment of

RESORT PHOTOS COURTESY GRAND HYATT PLAYA DEL CARMEN RESORT/NIVEL CREATIVO



riches. Among the resort's 330 rooms of various sizes, views and amenities, ours was a 614-square-foot suite with a massive soaking tub, Balmain toiletries and unobstructed views of the hotel's three seaside infinity pools, all overlooking the infinite Caribbean beyond.

Slightly jet-lagged by the two-hour time difference, Denise and I began our healing mission in the Cenote Spa, the resort's beating heart. The manager explained that the Yucatan Peninsula is dotted with 10,000 natural cenotes—"holes with water," to the ancient Mayans, who relied on the cenotes for

water and as settings for their spiritual rites. The Hyatt's human-made version emerges above-ground as a huge stone cone bisecting the hotel's indoor-outdoor lobby, slowing the pedestrian flow from the street, through the lobby, to the sea. A spiraling stone ramp cossetted in tropical flora leads down, down to the cenote's underground world: a fully appointed gym, the children's day camp that embodies the hotel's advertised "family resort," and the architecturally wondrous Cenote Spa.

Our masseuses escorted Denise and me to our massage rooms, their glass

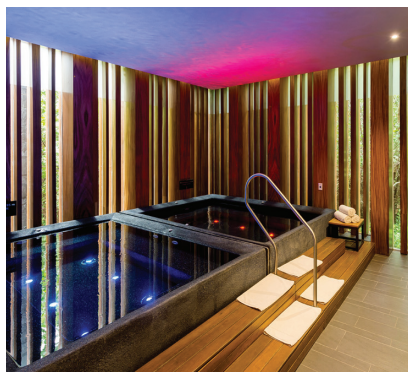
#### BEACH BLISS

After a series of injuries and medical setbacks, author and journalist Meredith Maran and her partner, Denise, enjoyed a well-deserved vacation at the Grand Hyatt Resort in Playa del Carmen, Mexico.



walls melding us with their jungle views. Rendered rubbery by our masseuses' skills, Denise and I spent the day soaking in hot and cold tubs, sweating in sauna and steam, rinsing and repeating. Lunch was delivered to the comfy chaises where we'd collapsed between bouts of bliss. While Cyclone Nadine raged above us, we sought refuge in the cenote's moist, magical center, a round, dimly lit cave built around a shallow circular pool, furnished with more of those inviting chaises. There, over the next four days, Denise and I also took yoga and Pilates classes from an earth angel named Esteban, who dispensed encouragement and soft touch along with seemingly genuine spiritual advice.

Aside from a brief foray on foot into the surrounding neighborhood, a tourist strip featuring Mexican tchotchkes and American mall brands at American-plus prices, Denise and I never left the truly all-inclusive bubble of the hotel. Why would we? Every staff member we encountered, from housekeeper to spa manager to maître d', treated us like visiting family. Once the sun chased the storm away, our most difficult daily choices were which of the pools to lounge beside, and where to take our meals. We could order poolside or from



**LIFE IS GRAND**

The Grand Hyatt Resort features a bevy of luxe amenities, including three infinity pools and the Cenote Spa, named for the Yucatan Peninsula's abundance of cenotes, natural wells.

our room. We could snack on pan dulce from the coffee kiosk in the lobby, or stuff ourselves at one of the three on-site restaurants, or drop by the Grand Club, where the servers remembered our morning beverage preferences and we filled our plates from the more-than-you-can-eat breakfast buffet of chilaquiles, chia pudding, fruits and melons, bagels and fixings, waffles, breads and pastries. Between meals, the Grand Club was our way station for cookies, chips, sodas, and espresso drinks. From 6-8 p.m. nightly, guests swigged bottomless top-shelf cocktails and mocktails and devoured Mexican buffets that rendered dinner redundant.

Our best meal—our best night—was the one we spent food-swooning at The Grill. Seated at an ocean view table under the soft glow of reflecting pendulum lamps, and under the care of yet another perfect staff, Denise and I savored the wonders of local Mexican beef. Which dish was best? All of them:

our shared short rib taco appetizer, my tender, juicy rib-eye, or Denise's French Truffle Burger, each bite a party in the mouth.

Our wonderful waiter solved the mystery of the many Israeli and American Orthodox Jewish families staying at the hotel. Turns out The Grill is one of very few Yucatan restaurants with a Kosher menu and Shabbat dinner on Friday nights. A Brooklyn woman I met in the pool, swimming in head-to-toe Orthodox women's garb, told me what a relief it was, having a place to vacation where she and her family could dress

and eat and worship as they do at home, amongst others who do the same.

Denise and I felt instantly at home, too, thanks to the sign placed prominently on the check-in desk: "Queer Destination: Committed." The inclusive, welcoming spirit of The Grand Hyatt Playa administered what no doctor could: the utterly pleasurable healing of our bodies, spirits, and minds. 🇺🇸

**The Grand Hyatt Playa administered what no doctor could.**

RESORT PHOTOS COURTESY GRAND HYATT PLAYA DEL CARMEN RESORT/TADEU BRUNELLI; CANDID PHOTO: COURTESY MEREDITH MARRAN