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ITALY

PATRICIA HARRIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Poseidon Thermal Gardens is arranged on a volcanic hillside on Ischia, and is one of the largest “spa parks” in Europe. One of Poseidon’s pools is adjacent to the Gulf of Naples.

## Ooooh ...

Get steamed, soaked, sun-kissed, and stimulated

BY PATRICIA HARRIS AND DAVID LYON | GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

ISCHIA — Leave it to the Italians. While central Europeans elevated “taking the waters” to an obsession with hydrological cure-alls, and the Scandinavians raised the pain and suffering of the hot sauna and cold snowbath to an art, the Italians cultivated the idea that having fun is the first step to feeling good.

At least that’s true on Ischia, the largest island in the Gulf of Naples. People have been enjoying a good soak in the volcanic hot springs here since the Greeks set up shop in 770 BC. After them came the Romans, the Ostrogoths, the Spanish, and then the Romans again (this time as Italians). Every bellicose race that plied this part of the Mediterranean has soothed its aching muscles in the simmering springs of Ischia.

The island has roughly 160 thermal springs and several “spa parks,” including Poseidon Thermal Gardens, which bills itself as one of the largest in Europe. The complex sprawls along the western shore beneath 2,588-foot Monte Epomeo, a block of volcanic tuff surrounded by volcanic steam vents. One of the island’s hottest springs (194 degrees Fahrenheit) bubbles up here.

“The Greeks and Romans used to start in the cold waters to tighten up their muscles,” Claudia Rubino told us when we arrived at Poseidon’s entry gate, “but we are so stressed today that we start in the warm pools to relax.”

“Pools,” in plural, is the key. In addition to the Olympic-sized swim-