

# Santa Cruz Sentinel

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## Best Day Spa in Santa Cruz Winner!

Felton-based **Spa Santangelo**, the *Best Day Spa* winner, offers services including massage, energy work, body wraps, facials, and yoga. Amenities include an infrared sauna and fitness equipment. One thing all visitors can look forward to: “Be ready for some real healing and relaxation. Everyone here has the goal of helping you *Breathe, Relax and Enjoy*,” says owner Melissa Santangelo. “It’s not just a massage—it really is an experience. Also, if someone wants to change negative patterns and thoughts, or heal from trauma, we can help! We are here for the community.”

Anji Rose first visited Spa Santangelo in 2016. “Since then, I have been going every month, sometimes even twice a month.” She usually gets an 85-minute massage. “Melissa’s healing touch has helped me to feel more embodied in general and more grounded and centered when I leave,” she says. “She has an accurate sense of intuition when it comes to zeroing in on areas where I carry the most stress and tension in my body. I have called upon her services when I’ve been in pain where I could not function. She has helped alleviate my discomfort and helped create an energetic reset. The healing bodywork I receive at Spa Santangelo is part of my self-care regime and a foundational ingredient in my recipe for wellness.”

The roots of Spa Santangelo go back 20-plus years. In 2000, after leaving an abusive relationship, Melissa and her 5-year-old daughter were homeless. “Many wonderful locals gave us places to sleep,” she says. “I was so grateful.” Fortunately, she had a stable job as AR Credit and Collection Manager at a Milpitas company. She started taking a lunchtime yoga class offered at her office. “I fell in love with yoga. Meditation was the key element that

helped me through that dark period,” she says. “I felt deep inside that teaching yoga was calling.”

A local realtor helped her find a house, which is the site of her business and home today. “The property wasn’t in great shape, but we were happy to just have a roof and a place that gave us peace.” As a single mom working full-time, she took an online class and became certified in yoga and Pilates. Then she started teaching that same lunchtime class that had inspired her to change her life’s path! Melissa soon felt like she wanted to work for herself. “Plus, the locals really took care of me when I was at rock bottom and rebuilding my life. I wanted a job where I could give love and support back to the community.” She enrolled at Santa Cruz’s Cypress Health Institute and graduated in 2003. She looked for places to teach yoga and do massage.

“I didn’t have much cash and couldn’t find anything I could afford,” she says. “One night I walked into my garage and realized it was the perfect space, with 690 square feet and six windows.” She started by offering part-time massage and 10 fitness classes each week in her garage under the name Balance Studio (she later renamed it Spa Santangelo; the name Santangelo means angel). In 2005, she realized her daughter was soon going to age out of after-school daycare. “I needed to start a career where I could be closer to her. Plus, there were rumors at work that layoffs were coming. I had to create a plan to keep our new home.” She became the yoga teacher and massage therapist at The Camp Recovery Center in Scotts Valley, remaining there until 2011. “This supplemented my income and helped me get clients. At The Camp, I saw clients for 30 days (the typical length of residential rehab). They often said, ‘we wish we could take you home with us.’

This sparked an idea.” She started to record guided meditations, and now has several dozen available. Next, she filmed a yoga video and wrote “The Key to Life is Balance,” a book and

workbook. “Clients could take me home and stay on the program. I also added detox treatments at the spa.” She now has two online courses including one based on The Key to Life is Balance.

Melissa has experienced challenges. “The struggle is real when you work for yourself. Especially during storms, fires, and with the pandemic,” she says. The fires (CZU Lightning Complex in August 2020) and COVID-19 happening at the same time were difficult. And then this winter, having severe storms, road closures, and no power equaled no business. Also, I had my fair share of being broke while building my clientele. But I know this is what I am supposed to be doing. The Universe provides!”

When asked why she thinks customers voted her Best Day Spa, Melissa replies, “I have worked hard for 19 years with an open heart, sincerely wanting to make a difference and help people heal from stress and trauma. People tell me they feel the magic in this space. When you are here, it’s your own private oasis. I make people feel at home.”

Customer Pam M. agrees the spa is special. “When you step onto her property you feel a sense of peace, tranquility, and awareness, like a quiet Om, with opportunity for reflection, harmony, balance, and manifestation.” She cherishes this memory: “During one visit, as I was midway through Melissa’s book on balance, I paused in her gardens. Each plant, trinket, stone, and fabric seemed placed in a manner to draw you into the experience of that unique spot, that intersection of spirit and possibility. There I said a mantra of healing and prosperity.” Two days later she received an unsolicited job opportunity that was “extremely lucrative.” She recites that mantra to this day and is in good health.

Melissa takes pride in serving the local community, and also loves that she has served customers from across the globe including the UK, Germany, Asia, and India. She has had return visitors from all over California—even a few repeat customers coming from New York and North Carolina. One of Spa Santangelo’s non-local regulars, Alicia Blanco, first visited

over eight years ago and started a tradition of sorts. Alicia and a group of women visit two to three times a year, driving from South Monterey County, Salinas, Fresno, San Jose, and Sacramento. “We treat ourselves to Spa Santangelo’s services and always have a great time,” says Alicia. “Spa Santangelo is one of our favorite getaways.”

They have tried many services including the hot tub, sauna, sound healing, massages, chakra alignment, and facials. “It’s always a day of celebrating—birthdays, goals, accomplishments, babies—all wrapped into one.” Customers also voted Spa Santangelo Best Yoga Center, which surprised Melissa since there are no regularly scheduled classes. “Since the pandemic, I’ve been teaching Yoga only as privates and as Yoga Hikes, not as large classes.”

It seems people have great memories of her past group classes. “When I teach yoga, I do a mix of pilates, yoga, and Qi Gong—ending with a guided meditation.” A new spa treatment that Spa Santangelo offers is “two treatments at once/four hands.” She noticed that people were mostly booking massages and “...they don’t understand that energy work is also very important,” says Melissa. “My staff and I created this service to help people get deeper healing by getting massage and energy work together.”

Long-time spa staff includes two licensed massage therapists who are Cypress Health Institute graduates: Shannon Cummings and Toku Kawai Beccio. There is also a reflexologist that recently started working with the spa.

