
THE WELLNESS FACTOR

Spa news, reviews and recommendations by **Judy Chapman**



AFFORDABLE HEALING

Wellbeing is often synonymous with expense: costly treatments in palatial surroundings. But feeling great need not always cost the earth.

It wasn't long ago that we visited our local village healer for a massage. There were no 'doctors' to call upon and our gardens were full of medicinal plants for cures. Today this tradition continues – in the form of healing spas. And while some spa creators continue to dig up old traditions to resurrect as unique spa experiences others return to the source, to nature.

"Nature is our prime motivation," confirms Jean-Louis Couderc, co-founder of **Papaya Spa** in Laos. "Everything here is locally grown."

Set in a French-style colonial residence, the surrounding garden at Papaya is bursting with mango trees, coconut palms and orchids ready for plucking. Native treatments taken here include the 'Traditional Lao Herbal Steam Bath' and 'Traditional Lao Massage' with many

therapists trained at Vientiane's Traditional Medical Institute.

At **Tamarind Springs** on Koh Samui, they recently unveiled their new 'forest spa', a sequence of forest clearings starting with a natural steam cave and passing huge boulders to a jungle oasis of an outdoor spring water pool and open-air tea sala.

Where better to try an authentic treatment than at the source, **Wat Pho** (www.watpho.com) temple in Bangkok, where, amid ancient sacred surroundings, one can gain a certificate in the indigenous massage at their on-site training school. Even better, the massage pavilion is where graduates will knead crushed herbs along your spine for a song. A one-hour Thai massage, for instance, costs just USD 11, and USD 15 with the hot poultice.

Jampeche Treatment Center (www.wildearthnepal.com) in Kathmandu, Nepal also offers homegrown treatments inspired by the healing traditions of the Himalayas. The menu boasts an exotic list of experiences such as Tibetan massage, herbal poultices, milk, mud and salt applications, all of which are based on the Sowa Rigya, Tibetan medicine's art of healing. Try the half-hour 'Jampeche U Shel Gi Kunye Head & Face Massage' to release tension in the face, eyes

THE WELLNESS FACTOR

Spa news, reviews and recommendations by **Judy Chapman**



and jaw. Any doubts about self-indulgence will soon be washed away when you learn that profits contribute to women's and rural economic development in Nepal. Treatments cost between USD 10-24.

Wellness, however, is not easily defined and can vary in its meaning according to one's constitution, culture and values.

In Bali at newly opened **Chakra Spa** in **Karma Kandara Resort**, guests can take a traditional Balinese massage (USD 50) in the temple they have built on the Uluwatu cliffs. In the sister resort, Karma Jimbaran, lucky guests will be granted access to the home of honorary chief of Jimbaran for a one-on-one healing session that includes a reading from an ancient numerological scroll based on your birth date followed by a healing session after which you are invited to spend time eating with his family.

Weekly reflexology is a time-tested practice for keeping your body cleansed and rejuvenated. Which is why those in the know head to **Kenko Reflexology & Fish Spa** in Kuala Lumpur where they offer a treatment during which little Turkish garra rufa fish nibble on the dry skin of your feet for 30 minutes. Also duck in for a quick fix for a migraine or back and neck pain at any time of the day. Prices range from USD 13 for a half hour head and scalp massage to USD 25 for a 45-minute pressure point shoulder massage. The one-hour signature foot reflexology is USD 26.

It's a far cry from the village healer experience, or is it? My feeling is that soon wellness will no longer be defined as a yoga class or a vegetarian diet but about embracing life's offerings, in celebration, rather than moderation. Some of the longest living people in the world are the French and Italians who drink wine daily. Discard all you have been taught. Spas will continue to evolve as we do.

In the meantime, here are some fascinating wellness experiences you should try.

Clockwise from top left: A room with a view at the Karma Kandara Resort, Bali; A pool of one's own at Tamarind Spring Spa, Koh Samui; Under pressure: reflexology at Kenko Reflexology & Fish Spa.

JUDY'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Fast In Silence

Rustic-chic meets ashram-living at Funkey Forest, a mountain retreat set on 200 acres in northern New South Wales, Australia. What's appealing is that these three-day retreats are affordable to those even on a writer's wage. Accommodation choices are dorm-style or pitch your own tent, but it's the three days of pure and sacred silence that has guests returning year after year. A maximum of 13 persons partake in daily meditation, gentle yoga, forest walks and cleansing organic juices. As regular retreat-goer Louise Barry says: "I just go for the silence. No need for small talk or spiritual lingo. Three days without my mobile, laptop and boyfriend feels great."

Cost: USD 253.

www.funkeyforest.com

Purify Thyself

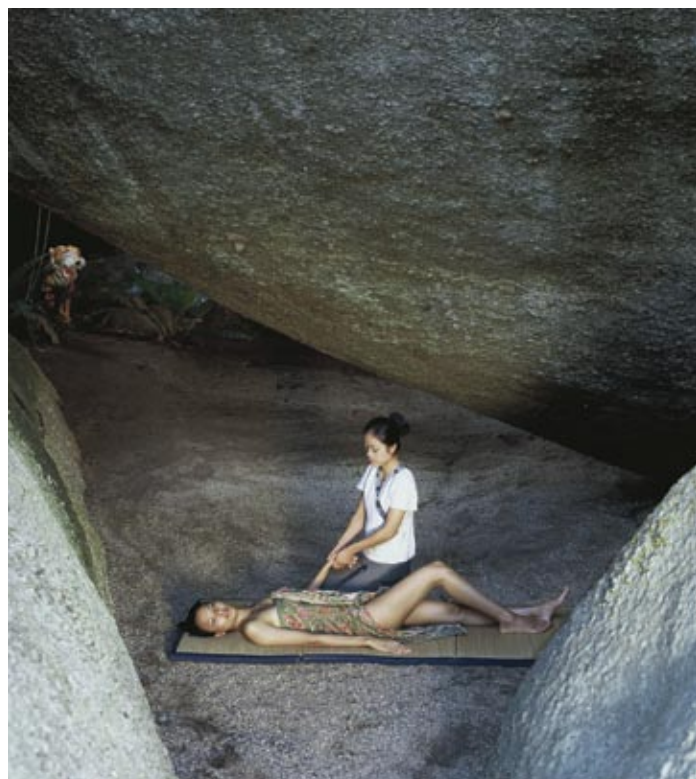
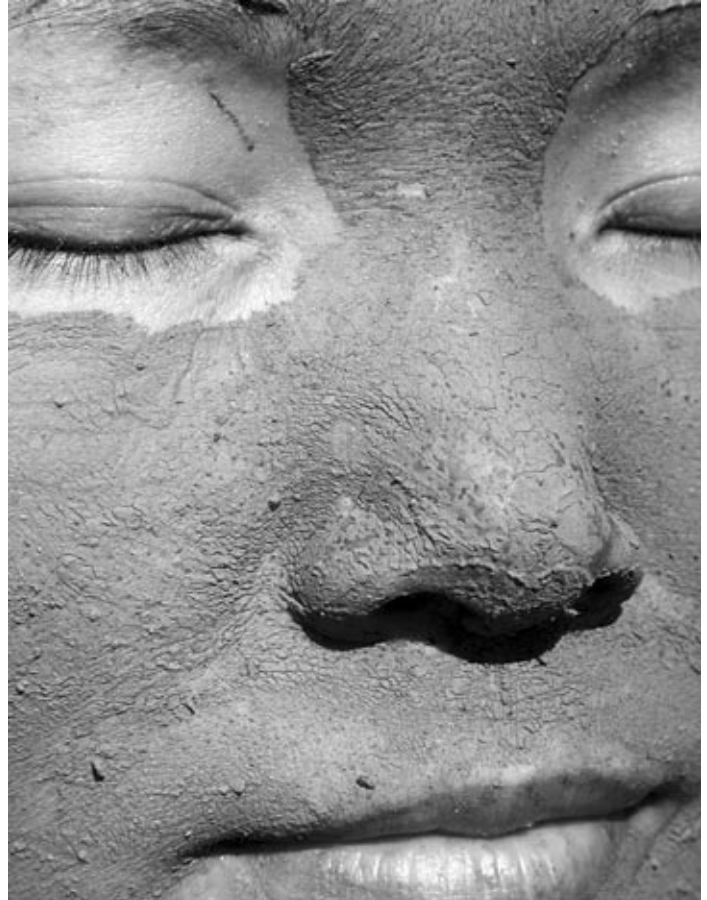
There are a number of fasting programmes offered at The Spa Samui Resorts, located on both Koh Samui and Koh Chang islands in Thailand. Reputable is the seven-day 'Clean-me-out' programme designed to cleanse the liver, purify the blood and strengthen the immune system. Sleep in affordable jungle bungalows or beach shacks whilst you embark upon a rigorous schedule of daily colonics, detox drinks, vegetable broths, herbal supplements, plus lectures on healthy living. Other health-boosting programmes include the 'Liver Flush' or 'Candida Cleanse'. Alternatively there's Thai herbal steam baths, Yoga, Qigong, raw food classes and Thai massage courses.

Cost: USD 300 for 7 1/2 days; bungalows from USD 28.

www.spasamui.com

Surf And Yoga

Left: Red in the face: applying a mask at the Jamepeche Treatment Centre, Nepal. **Below:** Tamarind Spa for a spot of soul searching.



Arrive jetlagged. Depart sun-kissed. There's nothing like the ocean to wash away the past and welcome the new. Samudra 'Surf and Yoga' retreats cater to those who want to surf and stretch against backdrops like the Maldives, Morocco and the Margaret River. With a rejuvenating combo of daily surf lessons, vitality cuisine and yoga, all of which are facilitated by a team of experts, the retreats cater to people of all ages, genders and levels of experience, in both yoga and surfing. And there's plenty of time to soak up the local culture and people. Tailor-made corporate retreats are available on request. Cost: USD 1,460 – 2,575 depending on location.

www.samudra.com.au

Yoga And Spa

Sometimes you need to slow down to get a fresh perspective on life. Radiance Retreats, combines yoga and pampering in yummy environments like Bali, Thailand and Southwest France. At the Gaia Retreat, an eco-resort in Byron Bay, the day starts with two hours of core-strengthening yoga and concludes with restorative stretches as the sun goes down. In between, expert healers deliver nurturing spa treatments made from homegrown ingredients. Catering to a maximum of 20 persons, every retreat is TV, sugar and alcohol-free. There are optional naturopathic consultations and sleep-enhancing meditations, plus guests are invited to partake in a tree-planting ceremony to give back to the land.

Cost: USD 1,337 for a 4 day/5 night twin share.

info@radianceretreats.com /