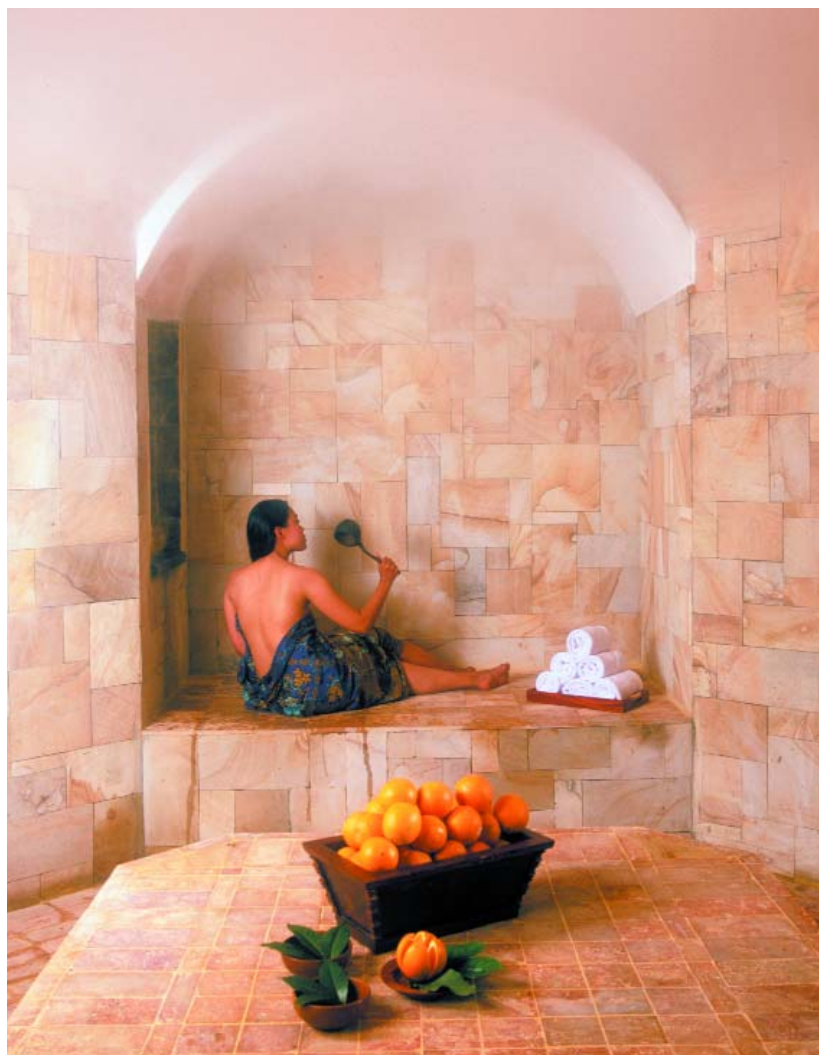


SPA GOER

BY JUDY CHAPMAN



WARMING UP The hammam at Java's Losari Coffee Plantation Resort. **Left:** A Turkish-style rubdown at the One&Only Royal Mirage.

Full Steam Ahead

There's more to hammams than a lot of hot air

IT WAS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF PARIS THAT I FIRST

discovered the steamy pleasures of a Turkish bath. Incongruous as that may sound, it was a remarkably authentic experience, complete with domed ceiling, mosaic wall tiles, heated marble floors, and a dress code that obliged me to strip down to my underwear. Thankfully, the hammam (which translates as "bath

room" or, more poetically, "spreader of warmth") was dimly lit and thick with steam, allowing me to enjoy the vigorous body scrubs and soapy washes with modesty largely intact.

Since then, I've become something of a hammam addict, joining throngs of devotees the world over. Dating back at least 2,000 years and reaching their zenith in Ottoman Turkey, hammams are the Middle East's answer to Japan's *onsen* (hot spring baths) and the saunas of Finland. They typically house three tiled chambers: a "hot" room for soaking in steam; a "warm" room where *tellaks* (bath attendants) deliver scrubs and massages; and a cushioned sanctum for cooling down over a cup of tea or Turkish coffee.

My favorite part of the ritual is the scrubbing, which involves a coarse, glove-like cloth called a *kese* (traditionally made with goat hair, though these days usually a wool-polyester mix). But even just breathing in the fragrant, herb-infused steam is enough to leave you feeling relaxed and refreshed. So it should come as no surprise to learn that hammams—or at least an updated version thereof—have begun appearing at spas not only in Europe and America, but in Asia as well. Read on to discover the region's finest.

SPA GOER

LANDMARK MANDARIN ORIENTAL, HONG KONG You'll find an authentic hammam among the indulgences at the Landmark's spacious Oriental Spa, along with mint-scented showers and heated lounge chairs made from mosaic tiles. Bad news first: it's for men only. But for those lucky enough to gain entrance, the scrub-and-massage routine is free with regular spa treatments (*Landmark Bldg., 15 Queen's Rd.; 852/2132-0188; www.mandarinoriental.com*).

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL, HONG KONG Not to be outdone, the 2,000-square-meter spa here features a crushed-ice fountain, a "crystal" steam room, and a *rhassoul* mud chamber (an Arabian variant of the hammam). Prior to their steam sessions, guests receive a loofah body scrub and Moroccan-soap bath (*8 Finance St.; 852/3196-8888; www.fourseasons.com*).

MANDARIN ORIENTAL DHARA DHEVI, CHIANG MAI Step inside the Dheva Spa's unisex hammam and enter a glittering world of mosaic tiles and exotic aromas.

Scrubs at this handsome addition to northern Thailand's spa scene draw equally on Indian, Burmese, and homegrown traditions (*51/4 Moo 1, Chiang Mai-Sankampaeng Rd.; 66-53/888-888; www.mandarinoriental.com*).

ONE&ONLY ROYAL MIRAGE, DUBAI Hammams may not be new to the Arabian Gulf, but they are reaching unprecedented heights of luxury. Inside the One&Only's Givenchy Spa, winding corridors and dramatic archways lead to the exquisite Oriental Hammam, where fragrances of rose and mint scent the air. Therapists from northern Africa and Turkey deliver aromatic black-soap washes and Moroccan massages as you lie upon a warm slab of marble (*971-4/399-9999; www.oneandonlyresorts.com*).

SENTOSA RESORT & SPA, SINGAPORE Everything sparkles of turquoise and blue inside the Galaxy Steam Bath at Spa Botanica, where the domed ceiling is designed like a starry night sky. You'll have fun selecting which mineral-rich mud to

have slathered over your body (*2 Bukit Manis Rd., Sentosa Island; 65/6275-0331; www.thesentosa.com*).

LOSARI COFFEE PLANTATION RESORT & SPA, CENTRAL JAVA The Turkish bath here uses spring water drawn from deep below Java's volcanic soil. Separate facilities for men and women include a steam chamber, a cold-water stone bath, and a scrub room, while treatments employ such organic ingredients as rose, lavender, ground coffee beans, and almond oil (*Magelang; 62-298/596-333; www.losaricoffeplantation.com*).

PRANA SPA AT THE VILLAS, BALI Prana's hot and cold plunge pools are a communal experience, but the Moroccan-inspired steam rooms are strictly private affairs (though couples can book them as well). And while the spa's turreted and crenellated architecture may recall a Mogul palace in Rajasthan, its exfoliating scrubs are a purely Turkish delight (*Jalan Kunti 118X, Seminyak; 62-361/730-840; www.thevillas.net*). ©