



I.SAWAN RESIDENTIAL SPA & CLUB, GRAND HYATT ERAWAN, BANGKOK

Book the glass-walled Nail Spa, available for private hire and perfect for intimate gatherings with friends and family, and create your own spa party at this 5th floor garden retreat in the middle of Bangkok. Not only do they deliver the best pedicures in town, the setting is ideal for drinking bubbly while your toes are massaged, buffed and polished. Therapists can also be booked for mind-soothing scalp and head massages while you catch up on gossip with friends. Alternatively, the six spacious spa cottages (fitted out with private steam room, treatment area, living room plus iPod station) make an intimate setting to celebrate in style. Once you've had a taste of residential spa life – well, you won't want to leave.

www.isawan.hyatt.com

THE STANDARD, MIAMI BEACH, USA

Shared rituals are part of the buzzy atmosphere inside the spa at Miami's hottest wellness hotel, 105-room The Standard Miami, a holistic paradise. Formerly the Lido Spa Hotel, during the sixties women gathered to play Mah-Jong and today the social vibe is very much alive. Dial-up the spa concierge, for instance, who will deliver tubs of coloured clay to slather on, then flock to the 24 DIY stations where guests apply muds to each other, or go for a clothing-optional mud bath. All the European 'social spa' rituals are honoured, yet with a modern slant inclusive of a swimming pool with an underwater sound system and aroma-infused steam room, not to mention daily yoga, lifestyle retreats and lectures in health, spirituality and sexuality.

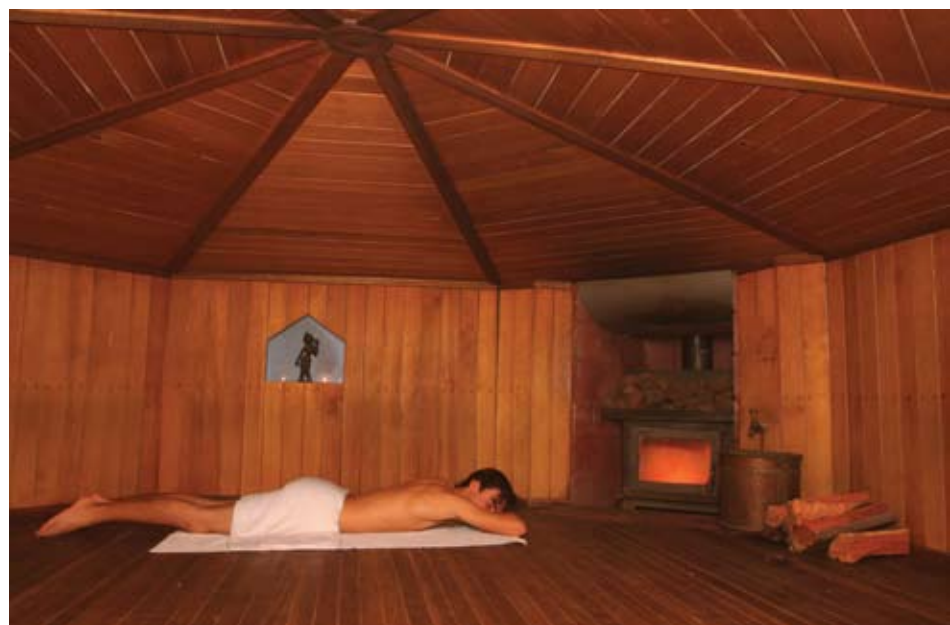
www.standardhotels.com



THE KIVA SPA & BATHHOUSE, AUSTRALIA

Tuesday evenings are community nights at Kiva Spa in the small town of Mullumbimby in Northern NSW. Inside the converted house, a tropical garden and oasis of open air heat and water experiences include an oxygenated Jacuzzi and cold plunge pool. But it's the wood-heated sauna, an octagonal structure with a burning fire that has locals returning every week for regular detoxification. Kiva Spa is an institution for locals, its tropical atmosphere perfect for social encounters. There are women's only nights on Wednesdays and private spa parties are held all year round.

www.thekivaspa.com



THE SPA, PHUKET PAVILIONS, THAILAND

Forget deprivation style detox retreats. Thanks to Phuket Pavilions, a new era has been born. Book the 4-night/5-day Ultimate Girlie Weekend package, and embark on a rigorous schedule of purifying foods and liquids while you have a downright good time. Picture you and your girlfriends drinking fresh coconut juices at sundown at the reggae bar and eating eco-dinners under the stars while you embark on five days of nutritional shakes, organic raw foods and juice cocktails, beach walks, aerobic and slow movement exercises. Splurge on detoxifying treatments: from cleansing salt scrubs and dry skin brushing to poolside massages – the choice is yours. Add to this, a wellness consultation with Puriti Purification Specialist, Deborah Williamson.

www.phuketpavilions.com



TOWNHOUSE SPA, NEW YORK

Book out the Townhouse Spa's Nail Lounge and Spa Lounge and celebrate with friends, food and wine while your nails and toes are scrubbed and shaped. The Townhouse Spa, set in an elegantly restored townhouse, is the ultimate stop for a social spa-ing atmosphere. There are separate floors for men and women, each with treatment spaces, steam-room, shower and locker rooms. The Men's Lounge, reminiscent of an old boys' club, is a haven where watching movies and playing games from sunken leather sofas is relaxation. Picture investment banker cocktail parties with golf-specific massages and a 20-foot-long putting green. For women, make-up sessions and bridal parties are all the rage, or push the boat out and book the glamorous Phoenix Suite, popular with celebrity clients.

www.townhousespa.com



There's more to spa than being solo. Sharing heat and water therapies has long been a joyous past time in cultures around the world and today this tradition is stronger than ever. "Community is the new privacy," confirms Susie Ellis, President of Spa Finder magazine whose top ten spa predictions for 2007 included social spas. "Social spa-ing' will emerge as an exciting new term describing opportunities to connect, converse, and play in the spa environment." She says the search for solitude will be trumped by the natural desire for community and a growing awareness that social interaction is an important aspect of health. From DIY treatments where you can slather one another with scrubs and muds to playful bathing houses, socialising as part of the spa experience, is back in vogue.

writer judy chapman



THE SPA, FOUR SEASONS HOTEL, HONG KONG

We can't think of a more glamorous backdrop for a 'sparty' than at this luxurious spa. Their Bachelorette's Sparty, for instance, is where the bride and her girlfriends are pampered in style. The package includes a private yoga class, use of the Vitality Lounge (steam, sauna, Jacuzzis etc), a one-hour spa treatment of your choice followed by a delicious cuisine dinner and a chauffeured drive home. All this, plus spa gatherings can be tailor made – picture bottles of French champagne or afternoon tea on the terrace. Not to be left out, the 'Essential Groom' package includes four hours of therapeutic massages, sports manicure and pedicure and an oxygen facial to prepare the man (and his best men) for the big day.

www.fourseasons.com/hongkong

THERMAE BATH SPA, BATH, UK

Where better for spa-goers to experience spa peace and joy than at the newly restored Thermae Bath Spa, one of the most historic bathing places on earth. Located in a World Heritage site, people have travelled from all over Europe for centuries to bathe in these therapeutic waters and today this tradition continues. Picture five historic buildings, bubbling whirlpools, waterfalls and centuries-old hot springs alongside a restaurant and treatment rooms. The 18th Century Cross Bath, for instance, holds up to 12 soakers while the rooftop thermal pool, open all year round offers the best views and caters to large groups. Inside the treatment rooms, choose from traditional and contemporary offerings such as the water-inspired free flowing Watsu.

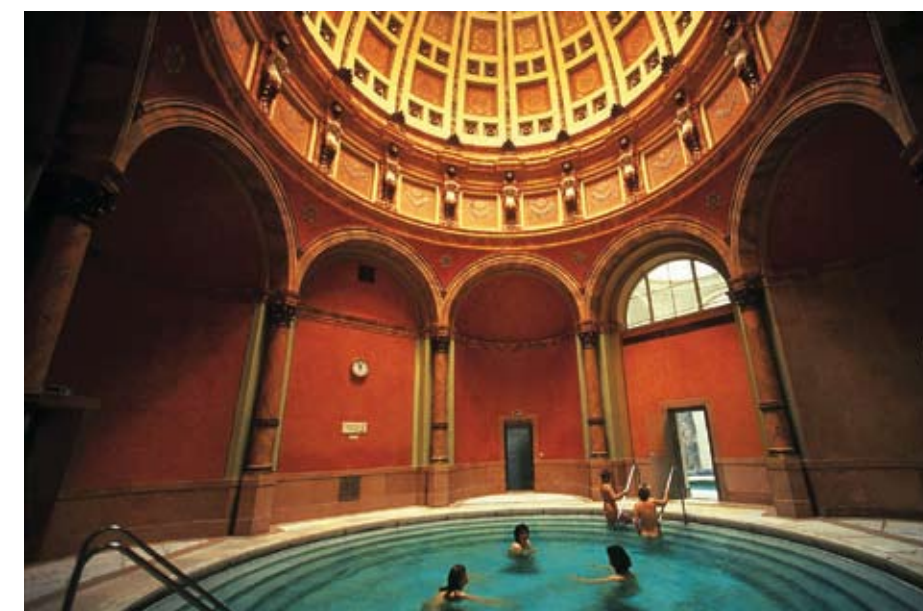
www.thermaebathspa.com



SHILE BOUTIQUE LIFESTYLE CENTRE, SHANGHAI

Eat drink and spa – and invite your friends and their friends too. Shile is Shanghai's hippest new lifestyle day spa. The theme, while all about 'slow living' and bringing back quietness to Shanghai-life, is warm and welcoming. There's the Study for leisurely reading, a healthful café, health center and the Lounge Bar with an outdoor bonfire for friends to gather round on chilly nights. Not to mention the Fei Fei Xiand Spa, which is so boutique that only three customers are pampered each day. From feasting to chatting and sunbathing, wine tasting to reading and listening to music, there's no better place to devote yourself to the pleasures of life. Stay all day.

www.jjtshile.com



BADEN BADEN, GERMANY

Communal bathing is a tradition dating back eons in Germany, and Baden-Baden, a significant spa town, is so worth a visit. The 'Friedrichsbad', a Roman Irish bath built in 1877, was once the most modern public bathing house in all of Europe and today its temple-like structure is a stunning world of marble, domes and elaborate frescoes that attracts thousands of visitors each year. Picture a thermal playground with a 17-step ritual of varying temperature water experiences. Traditionally men and women bathe separately, but here there are four mixed days each week. On Sundays couples can use the facilities together.

www.baden-baden.de

IZUMI SPA & ONSEN, HYATT REGENCY HAKONE RESORT & SPA, JAPAN

Bathing has long been a communal pastime in Japan with men and women heading to their local hot spring for social encounters and chit chat. These days it's also spas like newly opened Izumi Spa & Onsen that keep this long-held tradition alive. Couples, friends and families are invited to relax their bodies in nutritional waters that promise to relax muscle aches. That and the fact they offer indigenous organic treatments, many of which are based on the cycles of the moon, make this Japan's hottest onsen destination right now.

www.hakone.regency.hyatt.com

