



Home Spa by Judy Chapman

The Thai massage

“Now this is yoga,” I thought as I lay upon a massage bed peering down into the translucent Maldivian waters. As part of a three-hour spa treatment I was lead through a sequence of postures prior to a heavenly massage.

Similarly, at another spa in Malaysia, the three-hour ritual consists of a one-hour yoga session followed by the sensual Shirodhara treatment. In Bangkok there is an Ayurvedic yoga centre that offers a four-session treatment that starts with a meditation followed by gentle yoga stretches, a Thai massage and warm-oil therapy.

The beauty of taking yoga at a spa is that classes are tailored to both novice and aficionado. After all, yoga was never meant to be for the select few and was originally developed to empower the masses. In the words of yoga master O.P. Tiwari, “Yoga teaches us to listen to the voice within.”

Yet it is in Thai massage that one can experience yoga and massage all in one. Not unlike a Chinese massage, it is also regarded by many as a medical treatment. With its roots in Indian Ayurveda, the Thai massage was reportedly introduced into Thailand over 2500 years ago by a travelling Ayurvedic Buddhist physician. It is said that the massage style was originally developed for monks to increase their flexibility and promote circulation after sitting for hours in meditation. It certainly works! The benefits are incredible and long lasting. Circulation is improved and your mind will feel soothed.

Ayurvedic roots

Like yoga, the Thai massage has its roots in Ayurveda with perhaps some links to Chinese and Tibetan medicine, too. Not unlike the philosophies behind yoga, the Thai massage is also about compassion and giving. It is said the purpose of the Thai massage is to create a “harmonious balance for the body, mind and spirit” and achieve the Four States of Mind: loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity.

There are countless similarities between yoga and spa treatments. Both are centric practices, designed to bring the mind and body into perfect balance. Both disciplines can also help bring you into a place of

delicious rest where deeper healing happens. The beauty of Thai massage is that you feel as if you are exercising during the treatment. Afterwards, you emerge feeling alive and rejuvenated.

The Thai massage

Slip into loose white cloth pants and top and get comfy. As in Japanese shiatsu and Chinese tui nai massage, you remain fully clothed during this bodywork treatment. There’s no oil, either — just you and the practitioner working in union.

Though it’s normally given on a mattress on the floor, many spas in Thailand offer this experience in an open-air pavilion. Therapists usually start at the feet, with a firm but soothing foot reflexology-style pressing of the feet. After this a variety of passive yoga-like techniques are used to pull and stretch your body into shape including acupressure, elbow pressing and gentle rocking and pulling of the legs, arms and wrists. All parts of your body are given love and attention. The stretching and pulling of one’s ears can help ease headache and tension as the gentle fingertip pressure on the face feels deliciously relaxing as does the scalp massage. Even the simple finger-pressing technique is enough to get the blood and chi flowing well throughout. In simple terms, it feels fantastic.

Here are some Thai spa recipes to create at home:

Thai honey polish

Popular in spas around Thailand, this exfoliation recipe is easy to make and will make your skin feel sensational.

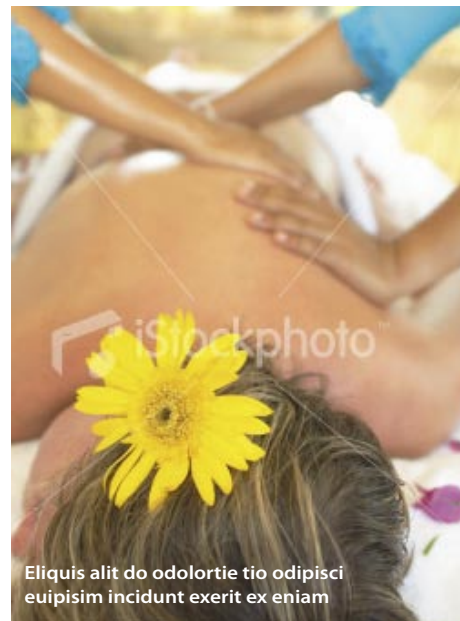
Ingredients

- 1 cup of runny honey
- ½ cup of sesame seeds
- A handful of dried herbs such as lavender and mint

Directions

- * Mix the ingredients together and smooth the sticky paste over your skin
- * Leave on for 5-10 minutes
- * Rinse in shower or bath.

Thai face & body honey steam



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Honey contains humectant properties and acts as a natural moisturiser to soften and heal skin texture.

Ingredients

- 1-2 cups of runny honey

Directions

- Simply apply runny honey over face and body and sit in a steam room for 5-15 minutes.
- Rinse in shower or bath.

Thai herbal ball

Also known as the herbal poultice, this heated ball of steamed herbs is often pressed onto the skin after the Thai massage or can be given as a stand-alone treatment. It was once used on soldiers during Thailand’s Ayutthaya period (14th-18th century) to alleviate wounds and bruises. The heat from the herbs easily penetrates the skin, helping to alleviate muscle tension, and is recommended for inflammation and tightness in the neck and shoulders.

Ingredients

- A large piece of natural cloth
- Mixed chopped fresh herbs of ginger, kaffir lime, turmeric, lemongrass and camphor

Directions

- Fill the cloth with the mixed herbs (should weigh roughly 400g or ¾lb) and steam in a hot pot or steamer for around five minutes.

*Test the ball on the skin lightly first to ensure it is not too hot.

* When the temperature is right, press the poultice gently but firmly along the body for around 30 seconds to one minute including legs, feet, back, neck, arms and buttocks.

Judy Chapman is the author of three books on spas and wellbeing. She is the former Editor-In-Chief of Spa Asia magazine.

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