

## Women's Era

**G**oing for a spa treatment — at a five-star hotel or indeed the day spa variety has become fashionable, but what is a spa? Is it a hot tub, is it the treatment, or is it a concept that is being used as a term in India and overseas? A spa pool may be used in a spa or not but as a concept, a spa is something different. The word and concept originates from the times of the Roman Empire when battle-weary legionnaires tried to recover from their wounds and ailments.

These were provided in the hot wells and then in baths so that they could heal their aching bodies. The places were then called 'Aquae' and the bathing treatments were called Saunas Per Aquam — the first three letters making the term spa and it meant health through water.

Around the 14th century the town Spa was founded in Belgium and rose to fame, still in existence today. Different places in Europe have used mineral water, sea water and marine substances in therapies. Hence, the spa culture invariably uses hydrotherapy as a defining feature.

This could even be termed from the steam or sauna treatments between massages and showers.

### SPA TREATMENT AS HOLIDAYS

Specific holidays are being packaged for overseas as also domestic spa destinations. The ayurvedic counterpart in India has existed for maybe even longer and today the treatments of Kerala and specialised massage treatments have put India on the international map.

# SPA

## An Exotic Experience

Revitalise the senses by pampering yourself with the health and beauty treatments. Luxuriate at a spa and have a great experience. By Ameeta Sharma



## Women's Era

In the most expensive range in the world there would be destinations such as Clinique la Prairie in Switzerland where a week-long package could be in excess of Rs 3,50,000.

There is medical spa known for cellular revitalisation therapy and other facilities including aesthetic surgery (a nicer name for 'plastic surgery'). Another destination would be Chiva Som in Thailand, which concentrates on health and well-being.

It has more than a 100 treatments to choose from and includes mud wraps, skin brushing and other treatments. The expense here could be just under Rs1,50,000 on a twin sharing basis.

An upcoming destination is expected to be the Dead Sea Spa treatments in Israel! Technically a real spa with various therapeutic qualities, the mineral-rich mud from this area is being sold all over the world in jars.

If you are in the close vicinity, do consider floating in the waters there—the only place where you can read a book while floating in the water, as you just cannot drown! Slathering each other with the dark-coloured mud before washing it off together would be high on priority of most couples, if planned in advance.

There are various tours and travel agencies which provide a ready package on offer as per your schedule.

They claim, "We have harnessed the healing forces of water by installing vivifiers. These, made up of specific mineral compositions, are able to revitalise and restructure the water in a natural way."

Closer home, in India, the up-market spa destination is Anand, in the foothills of the Himalayas, with a view of the forest and the Ganges. It is expensive but almost always full with domestic and international clientele.

One can choose from Turkish steam bath, a Finnish sauna or any of the other Ayurvedic treatments. A package for three nights per person could be fitted for under Rs 50,000.

### **In Hotels of Big Indian Cities:**

Catching on to the necessity of a fancy spa to entice the international traveller, hotel chains in India started to get in action. Almost all hotels that boast of a spa facility combine it with hightech gymnasium. Then be it the Amaatra in Ashok Hotel of New Delhi or the Leela Palace in Bangalore. They have their share of rowing machines, treadmills, cross trainers, and some fancy equipment for muscle tone and weightlifting. Neatly divided in cardiovascular section and weight management, they have the essential cleanliness level and entertainment possibilities with customised music and television screens.

### **VARIOUS VARIETIES OF SPAS**

The second section is of course the spa facilities. This is where one could choose from Swedish, Balinese, Japanese, Thai, Oriental, Shiatsu, sports, deep tissue or muscle, and lymph drainage massages among a host of others. With the increased emphasis and recognition of the Ayurvedic treatments, the choice only gets wider.

The spa at The Leela Palace in Bangalore delivers all the important ingredients of a laid-back but efficient treatments in comfortable surroundings. Goes without saying that they have their sauna, steam room, chill shower, enormous jacuzzi and other treatments such as hydrotherapy with the right equipment in place. The staff is helpful without being subservient, as they know their job well. It might get a little difficult to choose from various body treatments, body polish selections or indeed the luxury hydrotherapy possibilities, the facials and other treatments but then one has to choose depending on time constraints and your particular need for that time. There is even a body whitening Rani Padmavati's

Luxury Milk Bath for 30 minutes that could truly make a woman feel like a queen. The stone therapy is increasingly popular with both the domestic and international clientele and can be very de-stressing.

For the diehard romantic, hotel Amarvilas, located barely 600 metres from the Taj Mahal provides breathtaking view of the monument from the fourth floor dedicated to couples enjoying the spa treatment. Time it so that the treatment ends and you can relax together to watch the backdrop of the Taj at the time of a romantic sunset. Taking advantage of the location, the hotel offers a package 'Mughal Mystique' and true to the name the session ends with a half-hour calming flower back in a sunken bathtub leaving you energised and revitalised.

Then there is the Taj Wellington Mews, of the Taj Group venture in Mumbai, a property not within the premises of the hotel. But their Jiva Spa concept is classy and different. Their proclaimed aim is to 'guide you towards a life of physical, mental and spiritual equilibrium'. An ambitious task, and not achievable in a single



## Women's Era

visit, but then they have so much on offer that to sample all of their menu, you would need to invest a bit of time. They have herbal tea or indeed coconut water, apart from as much mineral water as you can consume. It is a good way to relax before and after the treatments of choice.

**Day Spa Concept:** Sometimes, it is not possible to avail that much deserved and needed time off and head for a dedicated holiday. But then there are always the weekends or a dedicated day to self-pampering. Women have the advantage of being able to select an outlet that uses the best products international market has to offer including the La Prairie range.

A day spa, unlike that attached with a hotel depends more on specific treatments rather than just fancy machinery. They are also able to make tailor-made treatments for certain seasons.

Blossom Kochhar Day Spa, for example, offers cool summer treatments using seaweed and sandalwood to not only cool your body but take away some of that

summer tan. Here, they do have additional benefits like the Vichy shower. Other day spas have basics like a steam or sauna too. Just ask and select to combine your own specialised treatment. That is the true advantage of a day spa.

### DESIGNER PRODUCTS

Most of these spas take great pride in the concoctions they are using to make us feel better and some of them have their own brands that are available on sale too. Himalaya products are popular, as are The Forest Essential Range. If you like the La Prairie range used in The Asian Roots then stock up on the expensive end of the range from Switzerland while on a trip to Europe. International brands are making an entry too.

There is Declor of Paris with a day spa in Bangalore and looking for partners to open new outlets. In partnership with Serena Spa, they offer a lot more than just customised treatments; they offer training for opening and running spas to international standards.

Then Dead Sea products are available for use in spas and also for personal use. With an Indian company marketing not only in India but also in Europe, Dead sea mud is available in various forms including the mask for body and face.

If the concept of this enriched mud and water was good enough for Queen of Sheeba, it is definitely good even today when natural ingredients are more revered than the artificial ones.

Local Divas of products and day spa include Shahnaaz Hussain and Blossom Kochhar. Both have their outlets all over the place and their day spa for bespoke treatments in South Delhi.

Then there is Kamayni Kanwar, the force behind the dream of Asian Roots Day Spa. Kamayni is happy using upmarket products for her own signature treatments and if you compare the prices of La Prairie treatments with those in London, it is a much better option to do it in Delhi.

This caviar for the skin really delivers what it promises.

**Selecting a Treatment:** If you are looking for a treatment that would get you all excited and aware of your senses there is little to be gained from investing in something that would relax your senses so much that you can think of little beyond the restful sleep in your bed, alone... If still unable to decide what you wish to experience, go for the signature treatment referred by the spa management. Do tell them what you wish to achieve in terms of results.

A fancy foot treatment of Jiva would be wasted if your feet are troubled by neuropathy problems or feeling extra sensitive.

By and large, the combination of exfoliation, a detoxifying massage followed by a body mask gives a balanced result. Do check the smells of the mask beforehand as you don't want an unpleasant surprise later as some of the herbs used can be extremely strong.

### ENJOY YOUR EXPERIENCE

- o Arrive at least 15 minutes before your appointment time. This allows you to relax and get into the mood for treatment.

- o It is best not to be uncomfortable with overeating when you go to a spa. Two hours after a meal is a good time to start any treatment.

- o Have at least half an hour relaxation time after treatment; a good spa should have such space available.

- o Avoid caffeine and aerated drinks immediately after treatment. I do inform the therapist of any quirks like ticklish feet, sensitive skin or reaction to any particular spice or product that you might be aware of.

- o However well trained the masseur might be, if you do not like the touch or pressure communicate it.

- o Any medical problem should be revealed to confirm that the treatment you have selected is safe. 

