

IN FOCUS
Thai spas

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un-thai me

{ Let Thailand's
sublime spas unknot
and unwind you

A flower bath at Aspara
will melt away your worries

Inside the cosy cocoon of my treatment room, the faint waft of ylang-ylang perfumes the air. Gentle music and the rhythmic strokes of my therapist remind me why so many holidaymakers flock to Thailand. It's not just the lure of the place's natural beauty, enticing cuisine and fantastic shopping – they also come for the spa treatments offered by the hotels and resorts of Bangkok and Phuket. Whether it's a Thai pearl scrub, an Asian massage, a papaya body polish or an organic facial, the treatments offered by Thailand's spas are world class, and there's something to suit everyone's budget.

The Thai people have been practising *nuad pan boran* (traditional Thai massage) for thousands of years. Masseurs apply pressure using the thumbs, fingertips, hands, feet, arms and legs, and apply compression using their body weight. Today, the traditional methods and customs handed down through the centuries have been combined with modern techniques for all-round fantastic spa experiences – and the principle of *metta* (loving-kindness) is still central.

Not surprisingly, massage is the most requested treatment at spas throughout Thailand. Thai masseurs are among the best in the world, and the choice of treatment is staggering – from traditional Thai massage, Javanese or Ayurvedic options through to new fusions – and differs at each individual spa. There's also a wealth of wraps, scrubs, herbal steam-room treatments, hot-stone massages and unique Thai therapies on offer. In the name of research, we road-tested our way through the spas of Phuket and the capital.

The therapist uses a heated flower and herb compress to knead away aches and pains, then essential oils are applied during a soothing massage. Lower yourself into the plunge pool afterwards to complete the relaxation.

Phuket

You won't regret offering up your weary body to the therapists at **Aspara** either (52 Thaweewong Rd, Patong Beach, tel: +66 (76) 340 608/9). An oasis of calm within the spacious grounds of the Holiday Inn on Patong Beach, this Singapore-based spa pioneer has revamped its Zen-like space, post-tsunami, to include hot and cold plunge pools and an outdoor Thai sala. Several Asian-inspired treatments star in the spa menu, including the 30-minute Javanese Lulur body scrub (1,000 THB; AU\$38) – a traditional Indonesian therapy that uses a mix of infused spices, herbs and sweet woods, that will definitely get your holiday skin glowing! The 75-minute Aroma Meridian Massage (2,000 THB; AU\$77), meanwhile, combines the best of East and West traditions. First the therapist uses a heated flower and herb compress to knead away aches and pains, then essential oils are applied during a soothing massage. Lower yourself into the plunge pool afterwards to complete the relaxation.

