

Spa Secrets

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YOUR SPA VISIT

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secrets revealed*

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SPA AND THE CITY

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SOME OF THE
WORLD'S MOST
HAPPENING
CITIES

WIN!
**A SPA BREAK TO
MARRAKECH**

AN EXCITING TRIP
FOR TWO PLUS
A RANGE OF SPA
TREATMENTS

Alternative therapies

TRY SOMETHING
DIFFERENT,
FROM WATSU
TO CANDLE
MASSAGE

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DIFFERENT STROKES

We round up the best alternatives to your favourite treatments. Go on, try something new. **Words: Victoria Riedl**

When you find a spa treatment you enjoy and that your body responds well to, it's easy to fall into the habit of rebooking it time after time. If it isn't broke, why fix it? But with spa menus expanding and new treatments evolving all the time, you could be missing out on a new experience that delivers the effects you're after. We've selected some of the most popular treatments and offered an alternative for you to try. The end results are the same but the journey is completely different. Remember, a change is as good as a rest. ▶

YOU LIKE: DEEP TISSUE MASSAGE
TRY: BALINESE MASSAGE

DETAILS: A deep tissue massage is a popular choice to release tension and knotted muscles. But how about adding a bit of pampering to your results-driven treatment?

Using ancient Indonesian traditions, a Balinese massage combines vigorous massage techniques, such as skin rolling, kneading, acupressure and reflexology, coupled with long, gentle strokes and essential oils to stimulate your senses and bring about a feeling of wellbeing.

A Balinese massage works deep down into damaged tissue to relieve strained muscles, so it's ideal for joint pain or sports injuries. It can also help with migraines and sleep problems, tension, and breathing difficulties associated with allergies and blocked sinuses. The Balinese treatment at the recently opened Mandara Spa, London, begins with a rocking movement starting at the back, moving down to the upper thigh and back up again.

The therapist will then select a bespoke blend of oils for the massage: 'Comforting' oil is made up of sandalwood, vetiver and frankincense; 'Sensual' blends ylang ylang, patchouli and orange; 'Energising' is a spicy mix of ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon and bergamot; and 'Calming' blends rose, jasmine and gardenia. While your body is stretched out, palm and thumb pressure is applied to improve circulation and ease tension.

Using shiatsu techniques, the therapist then works along the legs and feet, working up to the lower back. Pressure is then applied along the spine, while the stomach is massaged to increase metabolism and aid digestion. The treatment finishes with a head massage.

The Mandara Spa, Park Plaza, Westminster Bridge London, offers Balinese Massage for £85 for 50 minutes or £135 for 80 minutes. www.mandaraspaspa.com

The floating sensation and warmth of the water is like being back in the womb

YOU LIKE: DRY FLOATATION
TRY: WATSU

DETAILS: If you love the feeling of being cocooned, then Watsu (or aquatic bodywork, as it's sometimes called), takes it to the next level. Your body is enveloped in water to encourage a deep state of calmness and serenity. The treatment combines the benefits of flotation, massage, acupressure and thermal therapy to alleviate stress, anxiety and aid sleep. It's also a beneficial form of injury rehabilitation, as no pressure is placed on joints while it can also help to gently rebuild strength and increase flexibility. Some liken the floating sensation and comforting warmth of the water to being back in the womb.

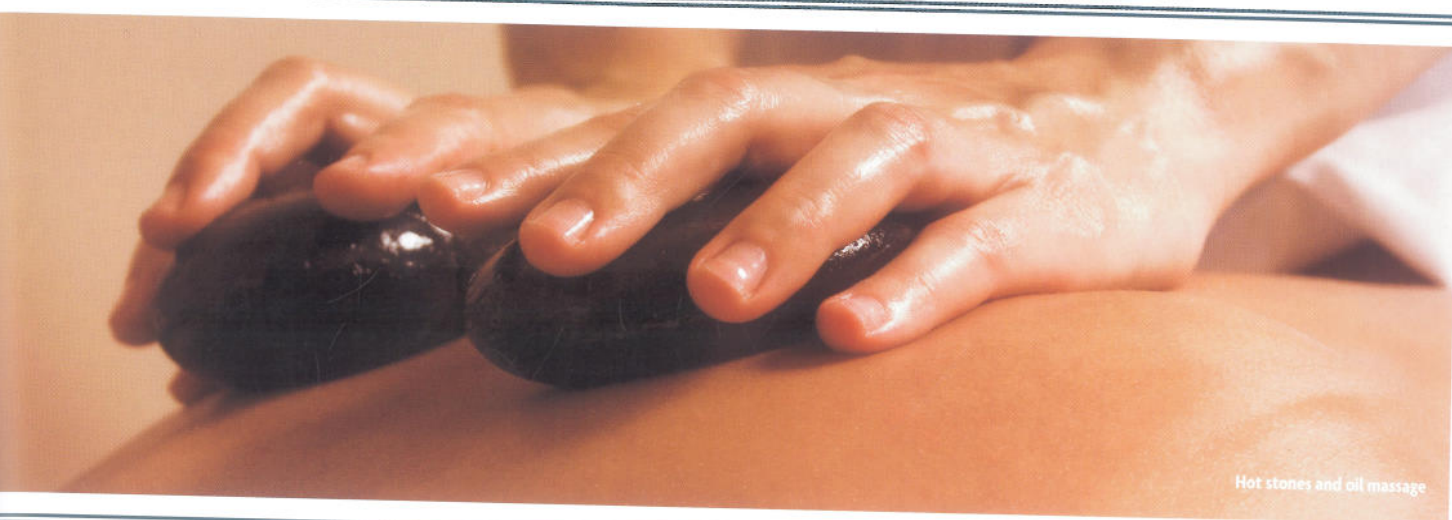
A therapist-led treatment, it takes place in a mineral-rich pool heated to 35C. Your ears and the back of your head remain underwater throughout to muffle sound and heighten the dreamlike feeling (earplugs and nose clips are offered if required). The therapist cradles and supports you and begins a sequence of flowing movements that manipulate your body into positions combining stretches with moments of stillness. The therapist will also add finger and hand pressure to massage your body underwater, using a technique similar to Zen Shiatsu.

Weights can also be attached to limbs to make certain muscles work harder. The best results are achieved if you completely let go and allow the therapist to control your movements. The flowing, floating sensation, along with the warmth and massage, lulls the body into a state of sleepy lightheadedness. Clear your diary and be ready for a long snooze afterwards.

The Thermae Bath Spa, Bath, offers Watsu from £60 for 50 minutes. www.thermaebathspa.com ▶



Watsu treatment, Thermae Bath Spa



Hot stones and oil massage

YOU LIKE: ANTI-AGEING FACIAL
TRY: FACIAL REJUVENATION
ACUPUNCTURE

DETAILS: It may not be an obvious alternative, but facial rejuvenation acupuncture can have dramatic, long-term results. Based on the principles of Chinese medicine, which address internal issues as well as external appearances, it works to improve your health and wellbeing in its entirety. For example, if your face lacks tone, facial acupuncture will tighten the muscles, so they appear more lifted, but it also treats the root of the problem, ensuring your body and organs are functioning to their fullest.

The practitioner places fine gold needles around your face and, if required, in key points of your body. You're then left to relax. The needles stimulate the muscles, improving the tone and firmness of your skin. It will lift a sagging jawline and create definition in cheekbones. Circulation is boosted and blood is brought to the surface layers to help diminish dark circles under the eyes and brighten skin tone. The production of collagen is also stimulated, strengthening and repairing the skin. And because acupuncture rebalances hormone levels, skin problems such as oiliness, spots and dryness are also addressed.

Facial rejuvenation acupuncture is a highly specialised treatment, practised by highly qualified acupuncturists. At first you may feel like a human pincushion, but if you allow yourself to relax and let the needles do their work, the results will leave you not only looking better but feeling better, too.

The So SPA at the Sofitel St James, London, offers a Claret-Coquet acupuncture face-lift from £145 for 40 minutes at (only available on the first Tuesday of the month). www.sofitelstjames.com

YOU LIKE: HYDROTHERAPY
TRY: ELEMIS FACE AND BODY
SENSATION

DETAILS: Whether you need a soak in a hot tub to ease aching muscles, a hydra jet massage to loosen your limbs or a dip in a cold plunge pool to get the blood pumping, hydrotherapy relaxes and re-energises. A variety of therapist-led hot and cold treatments, based on the same principles, are available and there's no need to get wet. The Elemis Face and Body Sensation is an all-over treatment that relaxes and re-energises using heat or cool sensations, with the added bonus of a facial.

Like all Elemis treatments, it begins with a foot cleansing ritual using lime-infused mitts to prepare the body and mind. The skin is then brushed using a natural bristle brush to boost circulation and bring the blood to the surface, ready for the detoxifying process. If you're in need of an energy boost, you can then opt for the Re-Energising massage — an ice-cool thermal muscle massage that undoes knots, tension and tightness. Warm oil is drizzled over the body and then, using the Elemis Cooling Instant Refreshing Gel along with hot stones, the therapist performs a deep pressure massage. The different temperatures and massage techniques increase the microcirculation and decongest problem areas.

If your aim is to relax, try the Tranquillity massage. Using hot stones, the therapist applies pressure on tense, congested areas. The heat from the stones and their smooth surface boosts circulation, drains toxins and relaxes the body. The treatment ends with an anti-ageing booster facial using Pro-Collagen Quartz lift, Tri-Enzyme Resurfacing facial or Visible Brilliance.

Champneys resorts offer the Elemis Face and Body Sensation from £75 for 55 minutes. www.champneys.com ▶

The fine
gold needles
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YOU LIKE: AROMATHERAPY MASSAGE

TRY: LUX CANDLE MASSAGE

DETAILS: The power of essential oils can alter your mood and transform a facial or a massage into a blissful sensory experience. But have you thought about trying candle wax? You may wince at the thought of hot wax burning your skin, but a candle wax massage works on your senses as well as your skin. Specialised brands of candles, such as Lux, Orli and Oskia, are made from a blend of shea butter, coconut oil and almond oil and are lit to create an ambience in the treatment room — the lighting, warmth and scents are a key part of the experience.

The candles are designed to melt at a consistent temperature of 38C — a perfect heat for the skin. Once the butters have melted (this takes about 15 minutes), they are drizzled over the body and the massage begins.

There are a variety of candles to choose from; all with a butter and oil base. Shea butter, or 'Tree of Youth' as it's also known, is famed for its anti-ageing properties but also invigorates the skin and improves circulation. Coconut oil is deeply hydrating to give skin a glow, while almond oil, which contains vitamins E and B, soothes and nourishes. Some candles also blend in Argan oil. Hailing from Morocco, this powerful antioxidant regenerates, soothes, nourishes and strengthens skin.

You can also choose a scent to be added, depending on your emotional needs: 'Harmony' contains extract of fig to rebalance emotions; 'Aphrodesia', with its exotic myrrh, is a sensual experience; 'Relax' has aquamarine properties; and 'Energy tones' the skin and revitalises.

The Amala Spa, Hyatt Regency Birmingham, offers the Lux Candle Massage from £75 for 75 minutes. www.birmingham.regency.hyatt.co.uk

GROWING TREND

Using salt as a health-giving ingredient is nothing new. Celebrity fans, including Gwyneth Paltrow, have raved about the effectiveness of salt-based products, and what spa doesn't include a salt scrub or sea-rich soak on its menu? But taking this a step further — and set to be the next big treatment trend — is halotherapy, which hails from Russia. Clients relax on loungers in rooms entirely coated in salt and inhale the fumes, while dry sodium is pumped into the air. Ultra-modern salt rooms such as this, which simulate conditions in natural salt caves, are opening all over the UK. An effective way to improve respiratory conditions such as asthma and blocked sinuses, they can also improve skin conditions such as eczema, and aid sleep. www.saltcave.co.uk

The hot wrap relaxes muscles, opens pores, makes heavy legs feel lighter and eases aches, pains and inflammation

YOU LIKE: LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE MASSAGE

TRY: VOYA SEAWEED LEAF WRAP

DETAILS: A detoxifying massage rids the body of toxins and boosts circulation, so blood pumps to the surface, brightening the skin. It also helps the immune system and even slims and tones (albeit temporarily).

A wrap ticks all of the above boxes, but is less hands-on, with more time spent relaxing. The heat of the wrap relaxes muscles and opens pores, makes heavy legs feel lighter and eases any aches, pains and inflammation. The heat against your skin encourages the body to sweat, flushing toxins out of the body. Afterwards, you'll feel lighter and healthier.

The Seaweed Leaf Wrap from Irish spa brand Voya uses the finest ocean seaweed, hand-harvested to preserve valuable bio-actives. It kicks off with a body scrub to cleanse the skin, so it's better able to absorb ingredients. The body is then cocooned in organically treated thermal muslins and seaweed leaves.

You're also treated to a soothing head massage to heighten the feeling of deep relaxation. When it's finished, your skin will feel softer and firmer and your spirits uplifted.

The Herb House Spa, Lime Wood Hotel, Hampshire, offers the Voya Seaweed Leaf Wrap from £105 for 90 minutes. www.limewoodhotel.co.uk



Seaweed leaf wrap

IMAGE: PHOTOLIBRARY