

Mrembo: Traditional Swahili Style Spa

Like everywhere in the world, the “wellness” phenomenon has taken over the island of Zanzibar. Spas are popping up across the island in the hotels often run by Thai therapists, offering a dizzying choice of treatments. However, on the Archipelago of Unguja and Pemba (Zanzibar) both women and men have been using the indigenous flowers, herbs and spices in their traditional treatments for centuries. If you want to try something different, head over to Mrembo in Stone Town for a Zanzibari experience.



One of the beauty treatments offered at Mrembo is called singo, a natural scrub traditionally used when a Zanzibar girl is preparing for her marriage. Singo is prepared by Swahili women; it is a magically scented mix of different flowers like fresh Jasmin, Kilua, Ylang Ylang flowers and rose petals combined with cloves and sandalwood. Prior to applying a little “Mrashi” (rosewater) is added and then the mix is applied to the bride to be a few days before she gets married. This is a big ceremony exclusively for women who all gather in much excitement and apply the “Singo” to the bride. The bride to be undergoes a daily singo, the scrub exfoliating her skin, leaving her fragrant and glowing, with skin as soft as silk. Many of the ingredients of the Singo are also used in daily life like garlands for weddings or to seduce one another by arranging them on the bed.

On Pemba, couples scrub each other at the same time; men rub their beloved with singo, while women use the invigorating clove based scrub known as vidonge for their husband. Vidonge is another important Swahili treatment derived from the past. It is made from the remains of clove stems and buds,

after they have been distilled to make clove oil. The stems and buds are pressed into a small ball, with a little rose water. The result is a coarse, warming scrub, leaving skin energized and fresh. Men enjoy a heat sensation after which they feel completely invigorated.

The vidonge is said to increase men's libido and stamina and could be a perfect gift to take home.



Swahili massage treatments include hot sand massage and kukandwa. In a hot sand massage, sand is heated and tied into a muslin parcel, then applied to the skin to alleviate pain or inflammation, opening the pores and bringing a medicinal heat to the muscles. Elderly Swahili people use the old, traditional massage kukandwa using mbarika leaves (castor seed). The leaves are soaked in hot water prior to applying them, which opens up the pores and relieves fatigue after giving birth, sport injuries and exhaustion.

Henna is also an important beauty ritual on the archipelago of Unguja and Pemba and is made of the dried leaves of the henna tree. Nowadays many places unfortunately use the very aggressive piko which has absolutely nothing to do with natural henna and is actually nothing more than hair dye. Real henna painting takes time, with Zanzibari patterns combining elements from Arabic, Indian and African styles. The henna powder is mixed with black tea and lime juice to retrieve a darker color and must be applied at least twice to get a good result.



At Mrembo Traditional Spa, you can try most of these little known and 100% natural treatments, which make you feel relaxed and fulfilled. You will also be able to spend an entire day pampering yourself with various treatments, sip ginger/lemongrass tea, and learn about Henna and other Zanzibari beauty traditions, whilst listening to the melodious sounds of Taarab music.

Date: 2010-02-22

Article link:

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