

Traditional Spa Treatments: Hilot, Lomi Lomi, Shirodhara...

Traditional spa treatments are commonly practiced in spas today and help generate a lot of spa visits, particularly to hotel and resort spas. Many tourists like to experience the local therapies and treatments of their travel destination to take away a unique memory and to gain knowledge relating to how traditional treatments have been used for centuries to assist the wellbeing of local residents.



A selection of popular traditional spa treatments which spas confirmed they promote on their spa menus are described below (source: Intelligent Spas, Global Spa Benchmark Program):

Thai massage is one of the most popular and successful, traditional spa therapies offered. It is not only a popular choice of locals and tourists in Thailand, but is also practiced widely across the world, enabling many Thai spa therapists to be employed in foreign countries. It also effectively promotes Thailand as a potential travel destination to those who experience Thai massage outside of Thailand. In Indonesia, the Balinese massage is a very popular traditional spa treatment as is the Javanese massage. Philippines' national massage is called Hilot massage and is practiced widely across the country. Some more unusual traditional spa therapies are gaining popularity including the heated sand treatment in Japan, where the spa guest is dressed in a special suit, lies down in a sand box and is covered with heated sand for around 15 minutes. This is a detoxifying treatment and is also being practiced now in other countries including Taiwan. Traditional Chinese massage and medicine are both widely offered in spas across the Asian region, and are gradually becoming available in other regions including North America. These treatments enable spa guests to experience ancient Chinese culture without necessarily travelling to China. Similarly, Ayurvedic medicine is also practiced in many spas around the world, with the Indian head massage called Shirodhara, widely promoted in many spa destinations. This traditional treatment involves hot oil being gently poured over the forehead of the spa guest.



The Korean bathhouse is a well-known tradition whereby the spa guest typically alternates the use of plunge pools, steam room and sauna at their own pace and completes the experience by scrubbing and washing themselves in adjoining public shower areas containing individual stools and hand-held shower hoses. In comparison, spas in the Middle East are known for the Hammam treatment, which includes the spa guest spending some time in a large, public steam room and receiving body scrubs performed by spa therapists. African Wood massage is commonly offered in South African spas and is known to mimic rhythmical patterns of African dance using Swarthout dumbbells. Hawaii's popular traditional massage is the Lomi Lomi, which is also widely practiced in spas across the globe. Bathing rituals across Europe have been common for many centuries and are now becoming more popular across the world, with many large scale bathing developments, as well as extensive aqua-medic or specially designed circuit pools, being developed in various luxury spas within the Asia Pacific and North America regions.



The majority of spas offer “signature treatments” which usually combine elements of traditional treatments and ingredients found in the spa's local area. These signature treatments are generally used to entice guests to visit the spa and are typically a package of multiple treatments, which provides higher revenue compared to standard spa treatments.

Intelligent Spas' last consumer research entitled “Female Versus Male Spa Consumers” found spa guests preferred both facial and body treatment products to be made from fresh, local ingredients, as opposed to internationally known skin care brands or the spa's self-branded skin care range. This is good news for spas that are on tight budgets and do not have the cash flow to stock volumes of expensive brands.

Given the nature of spas which is “healing through water”, it is important they embrace traditional therapies, not only to help maximise visits, but to also carry on the important traditions of their culture.

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