

The relaxing, beckoning waters of Banyan Tree resort in Phuket, Thailand.

Far East Tranquility

Ancient Massage Techniques and Stunning Backdrops Make These The Hottest Spas for Chilling Out

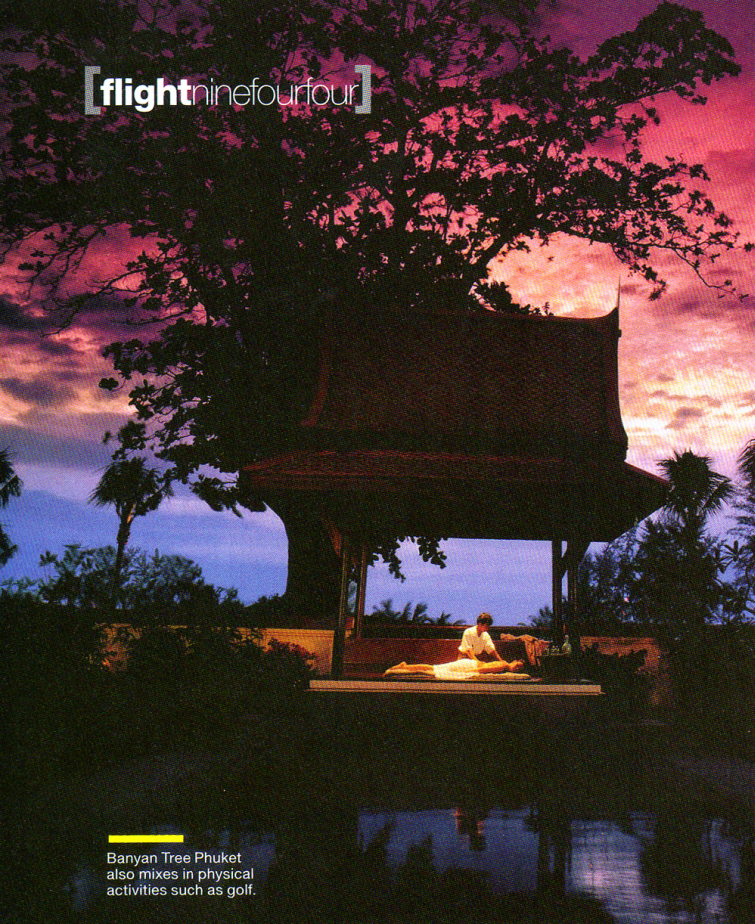
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Want to hide from the world behind the peaceful and stress-free walls of a spa? Sedona, Ariz., Hawaii, the Caribbean and even Europe probably make the short list of destination contenders. But to really get away, more and more celebs and A-list jet-setters are heading even farther across the globe — to Asia. The attention being paid to that corner of the world seems to be centered around booming economies, population growth and even the upcoming Olympics. But the exploding spa culture of the Far East is making sure that people are also heading there for the sole purpose of chilling out.

Just like everything else in this neck of the woods, relaxation is becoming

big business. "Spa-ing in China, while still new, is moving at a tremendous pace," says Dirk De Cuyper, general manager of the Hilton Sanya Resort in the southernmost tip of the Hainan Island off the coast of mainland China. "With city life being stressful and fast-paced, it is no wonder that more and more Chinese, female and male alike, are taking to spas like bees to honey."

The resorts may be new, but the healing power of touch was discovered ages ago in Asia. Ancient methods, combined with superb service and beautiful architecture, makes a spa getaway in the Far East the most appealing "new" way to say, ahh.



Banyan Tree Phuket also mixes in physical activities such as golf.

Banyan Tree Phuket at Bang Tao Bay

THAILAND

In many cultures the Banyan tree symbolizes serenity — quite fitting for this hotel and spa. The rooms are filled with vibrant teak furniture, and the tropical gardens lie at the edge of a tranquil lagoon. The spectacular double-pool villas are complete with a complimentary 90-minute couple's massage, one deluxe "Intimate Moments" experience, and daily in-villa cooked breakfast and cocktails.

The time-honored Thai Ginger Healer is a special treat and consists of a three-hour journey into the Ayurvedic principles of King Rama III. Begin with a stretching yoga massage to stimulate circulation, and then unwind as steamed herbal pouches are pressed against aching muscles. A Thai Herbal Wrap is applied, utilizing fresh plai to restore the skin's natural balance and radiance, as well as a warm ginger scrub, bath and footbath. The voyage concludes with refreshments and vital relaxation. This destination spa offers three, five and seven-night packages, which gives fitness-minded types enough time to check out a world-class golf course mixed with a top-notch gym facility.

www.banyantree.com/phuket/index.html

Chiva-Som International Health Resort

HUA HIN, THAILAND

About 130 miles south of Bangkok, this beachfront oasis (Elizabeth Hurley is a loyal fan) in the resort Hua Hin sits on seven acres of lush tropical gardens and overlooks the Gulf of Thailand. Each of the rooms, pavilions, and suites has stunning ocean views with private balconies or terraces, with access to the resort's plunge, hydro and Watsu pools. Prep for a day of pampering in the Water Therapy Suites, fully equipped with sauna, steam and Jacuzzi facilities, or sip lemongrass tea and mineral water while sinking into one of the heated waterbeds. Also, check out the on-site Niranlada Medi-Spa for some Laser Skin Rejuvenation or a quick Restylane treatment.

One of the most appealing aspects of Chiva-Som — aside from the rejuvenating massages and stress-reduction remedies — is the staff's holistic approach to health and relaxation. Chiva-Som, meaning "Haven of Life," is dedicated more to the overall vitality and well-being of an individual, which is why they combine restorative and healing therapies with other non-traditional spa services like emotional counseling, weight management and EQ4 Meridian Testing, to name a few. Upon arrival, each spa guest receives a private consultation to identify the client's mental, physical and spiritual health, followed by a customized healing program. There's a three-night minimum during the high season (October to April) and a two-night minimum otherwise.

www.chivasom.com/content/luahin/luahin_introduction.htm

Aman Spa at the Amanpuri

PHUKET, THAILAND

The Aman Spa at Amanpuri is tucked away in a serene coconut grove off the coast of Thailand, with stunning visions of cream beachfronts and mature palms. The tropical paradise offers everything from holistic and traditional therapies to hillside yoga sessions in quaint, teakwood salas. Aman, the ancient Sanskrit term for peace, uses its own exclusively prepared oils and balms in six intimate treatment rooms that overlook the Andaman Sea. Each of these rooms comes with a private steam, shower and dressing facility, as well as a secluded,

outdoor meditation sala for personal reflection.

During spa season (May 1 through October 31), Aman offers a complimentary one-hour spa treatment for guests staying three nights or longer in any of Amanpuri's Thai-style pavilions and villas. Additionally, Aman Spa guests can enjoy complimentary access to any of Amanpuri's impressive facilities, like the beachfront gym, the infinity pool and the seasonal water-sport concierge services.

www.amanresorts.com

Six Senses Hideaway

NINH VAN BAY, VIETNAM

Perched on the white, sandy coast of Vietnam is the Six Senses Hideaway, where guests indulge in the presence of the South China Sea, beautiful rock formations and original Vietnamese architecture. This destination resort, which is accessible only by a 20-minute boat ride, is set in the midst of a coral reef and nestled beside a mild, jungle waterfall. Spa fanatics note: the treatment spot is tucked away in a hillside alcove overlooking the turquoise Ninh Van Bay.

Six Senses Hideaway is committed to "balancing

the senses" by combining a range of indoor and outdoor spa therapies with physical wellness activities, such as yoga and Tai Chi. (Guests get to build their own customized day packages.) The Vietnamese Well-Being package is a must-try: For \$210, guests can enjoy three hours and 30 minutes of the Vietnamese facial, massage, and Fruit Body Smoother therapies, paired with a detoxifying steam session and a healthy snack to finish the day.

www.sixsenses.com

Chuan Spa at Langham Place HONG KONG

In Chinese, "Chuan" means flowing water, something that plays a pivotal role in many of the offerings at this exotic spa. Upon being pampered, all guests are urged to explore the body's reaction to hot and cold stimuli through the Chuan Tri-bathing Ritual. First, congested muscles are soothed by an aromatic steam and sauna remedy; then, a cooling Japanese onsen shower immediately follows to awaken the spirit. A relaxing soak in the Oriental hot tub caps off this ceremony to prepare guests' minds and body for the ultimate spoiling.

Designed for the international traveler, the Jet Lag Travel Recovery treatment starts with a jet-infused hydrotherapy bath to relieve fluid retention and stimulate blood flow and is completed with a rehydration facial. To maximize the feeling of peace and tranquility, all treatment rooms are designed by a Feng Shui master.

"The spa menu is based on traditional Chinese medicine, so when I arrived they asked me some questions to determine the treatment that best suited me," says New Yorker Anna Stancioff, who visited the spa during a recent trip to Hong Kong. "The entire experience was so relaxing — from the gorgeous tub in the bathroom to the tea they gave me after my massage. And the fact that the spa is 41 stories above the city provided fantastic views."

www.chuanspa.com/en/



The Spa at the Four Seasons HONG KONG

The Spa at the Four Seasons in Hong Kong has perfected the art of elegant escapism with its 22,000-square-foot metropolitan sanctuary comprised of 16 treatment rooms, aquatic vitality lounges and Four Seasons' unmatched service standards. One of the signature treatments is the Oriental Infusion, which starts with a refreshing herbal foot soak, during which a therapist determines guests' personal imbalance of yin and yang; from there, the treatment is customized to re-stabilize harmony. Exfoliation and massage are followed by steam and acupuncture therapies to leave travelers completely rejuvenated,

balanced and invigorated.

For the ultimate in V.I.P.-style pampering, request one of the luxurious Oriental Infusion spa suites; each one is fully stocked with a private daybed, vitality pool, flat-screen LCD television and mini bar, plus a bathroom with sensory steam rain shower. The Champagne and Pearl Pedicure should be enjoyed as well, combining shiatsu neck and shoulder massages with a jojoba pearl scrub, intensive foot mask and massage, all while sipping a glass of champagne.

www.fourseasons.com/hongkong



Banyan Tree Lijiang CHINA

It would be nearly impossible to feel disconnected with Mother Nature at the Banyan Tree Lijiang Spa in the Yunnan province. For starters, the property itself is located 6,562 feet above sea level with amazing views of spectacular Jade Dragon Snow Mountain (considered a sacred place by locals). The red-clay roofed villas entice spa-goers outdoors as well, each having private gardens with heated outdoor jet and plunge pools.

If that's not enough, many of the spa remedies at Banyan Tree are determined by the seasons and correspond to the Chinese Elements of gold, wood, fire and water. This summer, guests will pander to therapies influenced by fire, symbolic of energy and vitality. Banyan Tree Lijiang offers the Golden Gram Scrub to combat excessive body heat with the use of cooling mung beans to soothe inflammation and expel toxins from the body, as well as Lomi Lomi massage to loosen muscles and revitalize the mind.

The nearby village is also definitely worth checking out. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a throwback to another era, adorned with antique cobblestone streets.

www.banyantree.com/lijiang/index.html