

Thailand

Bangkok

ASIAN'S HAVE LONG INCORPORATED IN THEIR LIFESTYLES

THAILAND

the Land of Massage

The good, the bad, and the ugly

By LESLIE GLOVER

Thailand is known for its massages. Asians have long incorporated in their lifestyles the concept of health maintenance through "prevention". That is the basis of Chinese Medicine and most Asian massages are developed around the philosophy of balancing the energies of the body for overall "good health".



In Thailand there are many different types of massages. The "Classical Thai" is the most popular. There are two basic schools or styles; one from the North of the country, the other from the South and Center. They are typically taught in Buddhist temples, and recently regular massage schools have opened their doors to meet the ever increasing demand, linked to the extraordinary expansion of the Spa Industry in that country. The classical Thai massage is believed to alleviate sore muscles and tension by applying pressure on specific acupuncture points on the body, as well as stretching techniques that help ease joints and articulations. Traditionally this massage is performed on the floor on a soft mat, the person receiving the massage will wear loose fitting, "pajama like" clothing. There is a ritual associated with this massage, it starts with the therapist washing your feet in a wooden bucket filled with flower petals and offering a cup of green tea. Then the "pajamas" are given and the client will change into them and proceed to the massage room. In some cases the massage involves the therapist walking on the recipients back and

THE CONCEPT OF HEALTH MAINTENANCE THROUGH PREVENTION

inverted parallel bars are positioned above. This is possible because therapists rarely weight more than 110 pounds!

Another very common massage found in Thailand is the Foot Reflexology massage. Practitioners of this therapy can be found everywhere; in shopping malls, on beaches, you will find one on almost every street in Bangkok. Other massages found like the Balinese and the Tao combine physiological movements used in typical western massages like the Swedish and percussion strokes, and acupressure points stimulation found in Energy Massages.

My purpose for traveling to Thailand was to attend the ISPA Asia convention. As an International trainer for Aspen Spa Management for over five years I was trained to perform and teach some fifteen different massages including Asian energy massages so, I was eager to see at the source how they were performed. During my trip I stayed in a number of resorts and four and five star hotels, all of which had Spas, all of them superbly decorated. Unlike some tourists who stay away from trying local day spas and massage parlors, I tried as many as I could and soon arrived at the conclusion that the local establishments offered massages that were technically far better than their resort counterparts! And at one tenth of the price!

I tried to find out why this was so, and discovered that most of the hotels and resorts train their own staff, sometimes using companies from the U.K. and Australia? When asked why they didn't use local talents the answers had to do with difficulties in finding local trainers who could speak English and/or trainers that would accept to modify the protocols to make them easier to learn. The result is a standard massage protocol that is repeated for all the massages offered on the menu. The only difference being the oils used and perhaps the speed and rhythm of the treatment.

An article on massage in Thailand would not be complete if the veil of mystery enveloping the sensual Thai massage was not lifted. Getting the information was difficult but thanks to the travel agent who organized my trip in the country I was able to interview the owner at one of the massage hotels. There are a number of massages found in Thailand that are very sensual and sexually stimulating: the "body- body" massage where the masseuse, who is almost nude, uses her entire body to massage. Using warm oils that have essential oils and or plant extracts added, the entire body is worked and kneaded with physiological massage strokes. In spite of the strong sexual stimulation, there is no sexual interaction between the client and the masseuse.

Other types of purely sexual massages also exist and are available in very modern hotel like buildings where the client can choose from over a hundred young women therapists displayed behind a glass partition. The prices of services are based on the intricacy of the treatment and experience and skill of the therapist. In the eye's of a tourist or from a western persons perspective this would be considered prostitution, and by definition it is, however in the Thai culture and many other Asian culture's this is not looked upon negatively. The same types of massages are also offered in shady massage parlors found in areas where bars and nightclubs catering to tourists can be found. Those are the ugly ones! As they are very much like elsewhere, simply fronts for brothels.

For those who have never traveled to Asia and not experienced Spa treatments, there are many massages; even the most mediocre will most likely be better than what they would be able to find in their home town. The kindness, permanent smiles and soft manners of the Thai people will absolutely overwhelm. Anyone who appreciates spa services and particularly massage has to make a trip to this wonderful country.

A must in a lifetime and for those who cannot afford the trip, wait a little. Thai massage will soon be as common in America as Sushi restaurants! You cannot keep a good thing secret for long. ■

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