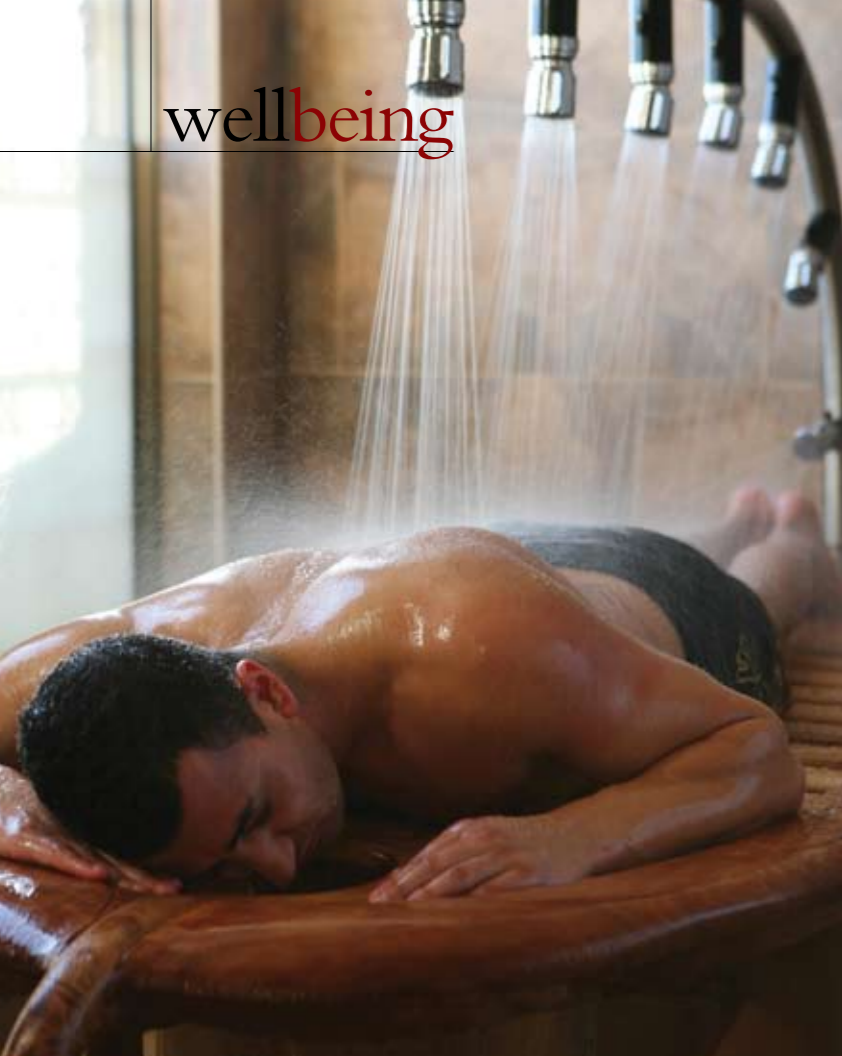


ASIA'S TRADITIONAL THERAPIES

WRITER *Melinda Yon*



AUSTRALIA

Australian Aborigines have survived for over 50,000 years with few possessions, relying on Australia's desert for their food, water, medicinal plants and spirituality. Their profound wisdom extends to healing modalities, such as "The Dreamtime", a form of meditation, expressing gratitude to mother earth and source of self-healing. The technique emphasises harmony of the body as a whole – mind, body and spirit – and they believed one must be in total harmony in order to receive the benefits.

Aboriginal communities attach much significance to ceremonies and the music of the didgeridoo. Apart from the benefits of the sound therapy through the vibrations, in Aboriginal culture the didgeridoo is believed to connect the human with the divine and the earth – uniting the physical body and reawakening the consciousness.

Australia is home to some of the world's oldest flowering plants, and Aborigines have ingeniously used these bush essences to heal the emotions, and promote health and beauty. Many companies have adopted indigenous plants and clays into their skincare ranges, but it is Li'Tya, an Australian company headed by Gayle Heron, whose skincare, spa products and treatments bridge the gap between spas today and the Aboriginal elders and their infinite wisdom, paving the way for a revival of Aboriginal healing. Using ingredients such as guandong, macadamia nuts, blue gum honey, oloo, pepper berry, wattle seed and lillypilly they have captured the essence of these native plants while retaining much of the spiritual healing behind their use, and give back a percentage to the Aboriginal community elders with each spa treatment.

Dr Holtz Health Centre and book *Logic of the Heart: Secrets of Aboriginal Healing* www.holzhealthcenter.com
 Australian Bush Flower Essences www.ausflowers.com.au
 Li'Tya Spa Dreaming, Melbourne www.litya.com
 The Sebel Reef House & Spa, Palm Cove www.reefhouse.com.au
 q1 Spa, Gold Coast www.q1.com.au
 Daintree EcoLodge and Spa, QLD www.daintree-ecolodge.com.au
 Silky Oaks Lodge, Queensland www.silkyoakslodge.com.au
 Huvafen Fushi, Maldives www.huvafenfushi.com

BHUTAN

One of Bhutan's ancient names *Menjung* means "the land of medicinal herbs". The landlocked mountain Kingdom with a population of 600,000 divided into three major ethnic groups, still lives up to this name today, hosting over 600 medicinal species of plant.

The Bhutanese system of medicine and therapies, *So-ba rig-pa*, originally of Tibetan origin but with its own distinctive interpretation of texts and practices, has been independently developed and is recognized by the national health system. Influenced by the ancient medical practices of Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Himalayan Buddhist tradition, the main methods of diagnosis are feeling the pulse, checking urine, and examining the eyes and tongue. Bhutanese traditional medicine doctors (*Dungtshos*) consider good health as a balance of the energies of mind and body and patients are often provided with dietary, behavioural, herbal and spiritual treatments. Therapeutically, they rely on herbal combinations, acupuncture therapy, and applications of heat such as the curative healing powers of the hot springs (*tshachhu*) in Gasa Dzongkhag, the Bhutanese hot stone bath using heated Himalayan river rocks that release key minerals as they crack in the steaming water, and the Bhutanese herbal bath using fresh, hand picked high-altitude herbs to reduce joint inflammation and soothe muscles.

Shambhala Spa at Uma Paro www.uma.como.bz/paro
 Amankora Paro www.amanresorts.com

CAMBODIA

Cambodian healing traditions can be traced to Buddhist practices and ancient Chinese medicine. The country's *kruu khmer*, or traditional healers, are still revered among the population. These healers bring medicinal, spiritual and even magical elements to Cambodian healing, with treatments including prayer and other spiritual modalities.

The Chinese medicine influence lends itself to techniques such as moxibustion or *oyt pleung* to unblock chi, cupping *jup* a form of accupressure, and popular amongst the older community is coining or *kooi kchall* for rubbing the wind out of the body, used to treat fever, respiratory infection and nausea. While massage is largely practiced by the *kruu khmer* or family members, the traditional Khmer massage is based upon the concept of applying pressure to key points situated on the meridians.

Angkor Century Resort & Spa, www.angkorcentury.com
 Raffles Amrita Spa at Hotel Le Royal www.phnompenh.affles.com
 Spa Indochine, Hotel De La Paix www.hoteldelapaixangkor.com
 Sokha Anhorhotel & Spa www.sokhahotels.com
 Visaya Spa, FCC Ankor Hotel www.fcccambodia.com/angkor
 Shinta Mani www.shintamani.com
 Amansara www.amanresorts.com

CHINA

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is an ancient health-care system that dates back to 3000BC. During the Shang dynasty a system to predict the season's changes was in fact the seed of the philosophy that has developed into the sophisticated philosophy we know today.

While it is impossible to explain TCM adequately in brief, in a nutshell it takes the Taoist holistic view of wellbeing, and sees the body as a delicate balance of two opposing forces: yin and yang. When the balance is broken it causes blockages in the flow of Qi (energy or life force) along the body's pathways or meridians. The five elements (earth, wind, fire, metal and air) also work to track the body's harmony. TCM treatments – from tui na massage to acupuncture to reflexology to herbal remedies – help restore this desired balance in the body.

Increasingly, Chinese preventative practices are meeting luxurious Western and Asian spa treatments head on, and the resultant fusion may just turn out to be greater than the sum of its parts. Steam rooms filled with organic herbs, healing hot stones heated in oils, delicious mineral and gemstone body wraps, romantic yin yang massages for two, green tea tonics and red rice body conditioners; a host of new options are ready to be enjoyed.

Chi Spa Shangri-La Pudong, Shanghai www.shangri-la.com
 Banyan Tree Ringha, Yunnan www.banyantree.com
 Chuan Spa, Langham Place Hotel, Hong Kong www.chuanspa.com
 Zenspa, Beijing, www.zenspa.com.cn
 Dragonfly Spas, China, www.dragonfly.net.cn
 St Gregory Spas, Singapore, www.stgregoryspa.com
 Pangkor Laut Resort Spa Village, Malaysia, www.pangkorlaut.com
 Grand Formosa Regent Taipei, Taiwan, www.grandformosa.com.tw
 China reporting by Sharon Leece

THIS PAGE: Mud ingredients used at Li'Tya Spas; Chinese cupping at Spa Botanica, Sentosa, Singapore. OPPOSITE PAGE: A Li'Tya Vichy shower Australian-style; hot stones pouring into a bath at Uma Paro, Bhutan. OPENING PAGES: Nepalese medicinal herbs by photographer Thomas Kelly.

INDONESIA

A population of over 220 million people, 250 different languages, varying geography and a diverse culture has produced many varieties of Indonesian traditional medicine. But shared by all is the centuries-old herbal remedy, *Jamu*. A tonic made from herbs, roots, fruits, seeds, flowers and tree bark from Indonesia's lush landscape, the second richest biodiversity in the world (the richest is Brazil), the powerful remedies are still considered an essential medicine, stimulant and beauty product today.

Indonesia's best-known spa treatments can be traced back to both Bali, where treatments are more holistic and energy orientated, originally catering for farming communities, and Java, home to the Royal family and palaces, where pre-wedding and post-natal treatments were popular. "Massage has been practiced in the villages to heal various ailments for centuries and has been ingrained into the Balinese people from a young age," says Trent Munday, Managing Director of Bali based Mandara Spa.

While Indonesian massage can vary from village to village, there are two main styles, *urat* and *pijat*. Additionally there are *mandi lulur* (a scrub made of herbs, essential oils and rice to soften skin traditionally performed on brides in preparation to marriage), volcanic mud wraps for detoxification and improving blood circulation, Balinese *boreh* (a warm herb, spice, rice, galangal water and oil wrap useful for aching muscles, arthritis and chills), *mandi susu* (bathing rituals using milk), hair treatments and post-natal treatments are common.

There are countless spas in Bali, Jakarta, Java and across the world that have adopted the Balinese spa philosophy.

Martha Tilaar Spas www.marthatilaar.com

The Spa, Four Seasons, Bali Jimbaran, Bali Sanur and Jakarta www.fourseasons.com

Maya Ubud Resort & Spa, Bali www.mayaubud.com

Bagus Jati Spa Villas & Resorts, Bali www.bagusjati.com

COMO Shambhala Spa, Begawan Giri Estate,

cse.comoshambhala.bz

Jamu spa products www.jamuspa.com

JAPAN

The Japanese have made an art out of bathing. For centuries, outdoor Japanese hot springs or 'onsens', have been a popular custom for people from all walks of life. Soaking in the geothermal and mineral rich waters remains a quintessential Japanese experience, whether social or medicinal. While onsens are generally located in the mountains or countryside, the calm surroundings an important part of the experience, *sentos* are the cities' alternatives, popular for daily bathing or cleansing.

Dry baths are also a feature of the Japanese wellness tradition. Enzyme baths are a hot mix of finely shaved cedar chips, rice bran, and vegetable enzymes which increase the metabolic system, and hot sand baths involve a sand pit of volcanic mineralised sands heated to over 70 C.

Japanese massage and healing therapies common to the west include shiatsu, acupressure and reiki to balance the energy fields. These are believed to be developed from the combination of *Taoist* and traditional Buddhist healing traditions. While the Japanese tea ceremony is well known throughout the world, the Japanese traditional herbal medicine *kampo* is of Traditional Chinese Medicine origin, using raw herbs to restore balance and harmony.

Nagomi Spa, Grant Hyatt tokyo.grand.hyatt.com

The Club on the Park, Park Hyatt tokyo.park.hyatt.com

Yu Spa, Four Seasons www.fourseasons.com/tokyo

The Spa, Mandarin Oriental Tokyo www.mandarinoriental.com/tokyo

Muzuki Spa, Conrad Tokyo www.conradhotels.com

Seikoro Ryonkan, Kyoto www.seikoro.com/top-e.htm

The Spa, Hyatt Regency Kyoto kyoto.regency.hyatt.com

Yogyu-No-Sho www.yogyu-no-sho.com

Outdoor Japan www.outdoorjapan.com/section-onsen.html





THIS PAGE: A tray of spa products at the CHI Spa, Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort, Penang, Malaysia;
OPPOSITE PAGE: Natural ingredients that go into spa treatments at Mandana Spas bringin Indonesian traditions around the world; Japanese pool at the Kinugawa Grand Hotel Rotemburo.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a cultural mosaic made up of three distinct cultural groups – the Malays, Indians and Chinese. With such a cornucopia of ethnic groups and their accompanying religions, while you can expect to experience the best of ancient Asian healing traditions here, the local healers or *bomohs* are still revered by many.

The Malaysian tribe of *Orang Asli* and their *bomohs* maintain the practice of folk medicine and home remedies. They may be experienced in herbs, massage or spiritual traditions passed down through generations and they believe in a holistic approach to healing, using both physical and spiritual elements to restore the natural balance to body organs and systems.

The traditional Malay massage, which focuses on the body's 600,666 nerves with long strokes and small circular pinching motions to break down toxins, may be a full body treatment, focus on specific parts of the body, post natal or to treat a special ailment such as infertility or impotency, and is commonly practiced from home. Other traditional Malay treatments include *bertingku* a hot stone massage, *mandi serum* a herbal bath, *bertuam* a herbal compress, *tangas* a dry steam and flower baths or *mandi banga*. Pregnancy massage, as in other parts of Asia, is also a tradition. Following Muslim tradition, treatments are often accompanied with chanting or a blessing read from the Koran before a treatment.

Borneo Spa, Nexux resort Karambunai, www.nexusresort.com
Cameron Highlands Resort, Spa Village
www.cameronhighlandsresort.com/spa-village
Pangkor Laut Spa Village, www.pangkorlaut.com
Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort & Spa, Penang
www.shangri-la.com
Ritz Carlton Kuala Lumpur, Spa village
www.ritzcarlton.com/hotels/kuala_lumpur
The Datai, Langkawi, www.thedatai.com
Eu Yan Sang is a popular Chinese herbal company founded in Malaysia www.euyansang.com.sg

KOREA

Korea boasts a 2,000-year-old tradition of public bathhouses and communal bathing, which for many are still a regular weekly routine. Sometimes found in the same places, two increasingly popular traditions with the Koreans, for the health benefits and sheer entertainment value, are *jjimjilbang* and *hanjeungmak* loosely translated as sweat rooms. Both are forms of thermo-therapy, causing the body to sweat, excreting wastes and toxins, increasing the metabolism and relaxing the body. Rooms may be created using a variety of materials such as ocher, charcoal, jade and amythyst and are of varying heats, yet none as hot as the *hanjeungmak* room, made of heated stone domes.

The Korean body scrub, (similar to a hamam scrub) is an exfoliating treatment where virtually every part of the body is scrubbed – hard! Koreans like to suffer for their beauty. Performed by an *ajuma* (middle-aged Korean woman) it assists with skin softening and lighting as all the dead skin cells from the sweating rituals are removed.

The traditional Korean massage *ji-ap sul*, is another treatment not for the faint-hearted. The deep tissue massage and uses deep pressure point and muscle stimulation and long strokes, abdominal massage reaching the inner organs, and stretching for pain release, energy renewal and emotional balancing.

W Seoul Walkerhill, Away Spa www.wseoul.com
Sauna – Hurest fitness and spa www.hurest.co.kr/
Central Spa www.centralspa.co.kr
Chunjiyun www.chunjiyun.co.kr
Myong Dong Han Jyu Mak www.246mdeste.co.kr
Ginseng Bathhouse, Sydney, Australia, www.gingsengbathhouse.com.au

NEPAL

The geographical position, latitudinal variation and altitude found in Nepal gives rise to its rich bio-diversity and ecosystem, boasting over 600 medicinal and aromatic plants known for their rejuvenative and life-enhancing properties, many of which are used by healers.

The country has an estimated 36 different ethnic and cultural groups and two recognised healing and herbal traditions. Ayurveda comes from the south and is practiced by *baidyas*, who use elixirs, massage and herbal preparations to cure illness, while the ethno-medical system of Tibetan Medicine, *sowa rigpa* is an indigenous medicine practiced by the *amchis*, with knowledge often passed from one generation to the next by word of mouth.

Complementary medicine is a large part of the culture, with indigenous healing techniques amongst tribes varying from each region. Other forms of medicine include Nepalese faith healers or *dhami-jhankeri*, common to the mountain areas, the *pandit-lama-gubhaju-pujari* or priests and the *gyotishi* or astrologers.

Carroll Dunham is a gifted anthropologist who has long worked with the indigenous tribes of Nepal, setting up Wild Earth Nepal which sells Himalayan products to help them document and maintain their cultural and medicinal philosophies, and bring in a source of income from outside the country.

Wild Earth Nepal www.wildearthnepal.com
Dr. Kerala's Ayurveda Health Home www.ayurveda.com.np
The Fulbari Resort & Spa, Nepal www.fulbari.com
The Gokarna Golf Resort & Spa, www.gokarna.com
Dwarika's Heritage Hotel, Nepal www.dwarikas.com
Shangri-la Hotels & Resorts, CHI Spas www.shangri-la.com

“Many of the indigenous healing therapies of Nepal are an incredible resource and contribution to global healing.”

CARROLL DUNHAM, WILD EARTH, NEPAL

PHILIPPINES

Although the Philippines has a rich tapestry of Spanish, American, and indigenous Asian influences, the Filipino Traditional Healing modalities have existed for centuries and remain resilient.

Given the 7,107 islands making up the Philippine Archipelago, and number of ethno-linguistics groups, it is no surprise there are many categories of folk medicine which are popular. Traditional birth attendants *hilot sa panganganak*, therapeutic massage healers *hilot sa pilay* and herbalists *arbularyo* dominate the landscape of Filipino indigenous medicine in each of the 42,000 villages in the country, alongside the shamans or spiritual healers *mantatawas* or *babaylan*. The majority of these healers undergo apprenticeship with older healers of the family, kin and tribe. As many healers consider their healing craft as God-given, prayers (an essential and integral part of rural life) and religious rituals form part of the healing practices.

“The persistence of patronage of Filipino traditional medicine by the people shows that it is an effective and efficacious method of healing. The practices and rituals conform with the people’s world view that humankind is interlinked in harmony, balance and synergy with the universe, nature and fellow humankind. Health, healing and wholeness are restored by our indigenous healers,” says Dr Jaime Galvez Tan, former Secretary of Health and professor of Integrative Medicine from the University of the Philippines College of Medicine.

The more popular expressions of Filipino Traditional Healing in Philippine spas include Hilot massage using virgin coconut oil and banana leaves to identify areas of energy imbalance; *dagdagay*, an indigenous foot reflexology using bamboo; *paligo* or *banos*, medicinal mixtures of leaves and flowers made into a decoction for cleansing and detoxification; *olsob* or *suob*, a steam with medicinal herbs; *dinalisay*, a herbal drink; and *kisig galing*, biomagnetic energy healing to remove toxins and infuse positive energies.

The Farm at San Benito www.thefarm.com.ph
Mandarin Oriental, Manila www.mandarinoriental.com
Sanctuario Spa, Manila www.sanctuario.com.ph
Mandala Spa, Boracay www.mandalaspa.com
The Bellevue Manila, www.thebellevue.com.ph
Amuma Spa, Maribago Bluewater Resort, Cebu, www.bluewater.com.ph

NEW ZEALAND

Situated on the famous active volcanic belt known as the ‘Pacific rim of fire’, New Zealand is recognised for its geothermal activity and is ranked among the top hot spring mineral water sites in the world. It’s also one of the few countries in the world that can boast mud pools and both these and hot springs were used as sources of healing and revitalisation for Maori warriors.

Many cultural elements of Maori tradition are kept closely within the seven active tribes of Aotearoa (the Land of the Long White Cloud), particularly the use of Maori herbal medicine, known as *Te Rongoa*, with ingredients such as manuka and kawa kawa plants and flaxseed. *Tonghuan*, the traditional Maori healers, are mediators between the spirits and the living, and use a combination of spiritual healing and herbal medicines to cure the sick. Maoris have a profound respect for the earth and nature, praying to acknowledge the earth, people and the gods, and chanting when performing any healing techniques. Today, the Maori healthcare system is based on a holistic model incorporating the physical, emotional, family and spiritual aspects of health.

Waiwera Infinity Thermal Spa Resort, North Island, New Zealand’s first spa www.waiwera.co.nz
Hells Gate & Waiora Spa, Rotorua www.hellsgate.co.nz
Polynesia Spa, Rotorua, for hot springs www.polynesianspa.co.nz

OPPOSITE PAGE: Picking medicinal herbs on a Nepalese hillside by Thomas Kelly; sulphurous geothermal activity at Hells Gate, Rotorua, New Zealand by Catharine Nicol.



THAILAND

Many Thai healing techniques and remedies are believed to be of ancient Indian origin given the parallels to Ayurveda found in some of the Thai healing concepts and names. Medicine was introduced to Thailand by the herbalists and healing trained missionary monks, and were further developed in Buddhist monasteries and temples where Thai people sought relief.

It was over 2,000 years ago that monks introduced the famous traditional Thai massage or *nuad boran* as a medical massage. Initially practiced as a treatment to soothe the muscles of workers from the rice fields, last century the King of Siam insisted by royal decree that the technique incorporate an exercise element. The massage stimulates the ten main Thai meridians or *nadis* to increase the flow of energy and help the body detox, balance and heal.

The use of herbs is a rich cultural tradition in Thailand and believed to have Indian, Chinese, and Khmer influences. Herbs were essential to rural and hill tribe wellbeing which followed local folklore healing traditions based on the healer's belief and ability to harness the power of plants and minerals for energy. Herbs are central to the Thai steam or sauna, where turmeric, prai, lemongrass, camphor and kaffir lime open the pores and help detox. Herbs were also often wrapped in cloth to make a compress, and steamed and kneaded on the body to release muscle tension.

Buddhist monks also follow spiritual beliefs, believing many diseases flow from a troubled spirit and they follow a tradition of prayer, meditation, mantras, and mythology, which are designed to heal the spirit in order to heal the body.

Chao Phraya Abhaibhubejhr Hospital, Prachinburi, www.abhaibhubejhr.org
 Tea Tree Spa, Phuket www.phuket-hotel.org/crowneplaza/teatreespa.htm
 Sukko Spa, Phuket, www.sukkospa.com
 Mandarin Oriental Dhara Devi, Chiang Mai, www.mandarinoriental.com
 Four Seasons, Chang Mai www.fourseasons.com/chiangmai
 Baan Thai, Bangkok, www.bangkok.com/baanthai
 Dulaya Spa, Davis Hotel, Bangkok, www.dulayaspa.com

VIETNAM

There are three known Vietnamese medical traditions that have co-existed in Vietnam for centuries. *Thuoc bac* is a northern medicine written in Chinese characters and used for diagnosis and prescription remedies. It relied on a four-part clinical examination (visual, auditory, questioning and pulse). *Thuoc nam* is the southern medicine, which was passed down orally through the generations, and practiced in the rural areas and villages, relying exclusively on available tropical plants and animals, and finally the more recent *thuoc tay* or western medicine.

The most common *thuoc bac* is based on the familiar Chinese medicine concepts of yin and yang, (known as *am* and *duong* in Vietnamese). When there is an imbalance of these two vital forces illness will result. Other popular healing techniques used in Vietnam include acupuncture and acupressure, and more recently facial reflexology developed in 1980 by Vietnamese doctors in Ho Chi Minh City as a less invasive alternative to facial acupuncture. Also popular are *Xong*, using herbs for inhalation and steam baths, strong balms like tiger balm, for muscle relief and (similar to Cambodia) coining *cao gio*, a mild dermabrasion method, cupping or *giac* and pinching, *bat gio*.

Evason Ana Mandara & Six Senses Spa, Nha Trang, www.sixsenses.com
 Life Wellness Resorts www.life-resorts.com
 Park Hyatt Saigon, HCMC, saigon.park.hyatt.com
 Qi Salon & Spas, www.qispa.com.vn
 Spa Tropic, HCMC, www.spatropic.com
 Pilgrimage Resort, Hue, www.pilgrimagevillage.com

ABOVE: Preparing the banana leaf for a Hilot spa treatment by Creative Concoctions; a Thai massage courtesy of Hilton Phuket Arcadia, Thailand.