

By Bryan Durocher



BRIGHT LIGHTS,

Soothing Cities

Once considered a distant land of foreign enchantment and mystery, the Asian continent has become a power player in the new luxury superspas opening throughout the world. Business is booming, with the spa industry growing at an annual rate of 200%, according to the Thai Spa Association. In addition, spa travel is the fastest-growing tourism sector in the Asia-Pacific region.

With a mix of jet-setting business professionals and Asia's own spa-going communities, three new spas are paving the way for a new wellness experience in two of the continent's major cities, Tokyo and Shanghai.

Tradition meets technology

Japan is a country of dichotomies, balancing a culture steeped in tradition while eagerly standing at the threshold of technology. Tokyo—the country's largest city—is at the forefront of creating a unique spa experience, with two new luxury hotels setting the example in service, architecture and modern treatments.

Located at the top of the Tokyo Shiodome Building, the Conrad Tokyo is the latest lavish venture to open in the Ginza district, which consists of some of the world's most expensive real estate. Upon entering the lobby, Japanese comfort and inspiration are accentuated by exemplary design and panoramic views. The 290-room hotel provides world-class accommodations and dining experiences created by famed chef Gordon Ramsay, the host of FOX's *Hell's Kitchen*.

The Conrad Tokyo's Mizuki Spa is one of the largest facilities in Tokyo. It features modern Japanese design that evokes a sense of tranquility, and offers a blend of Eastern and Western treatment

methods that is exclusive to the spa. The design of pure lines and soft calming colors also incorporates water and the moon—two powerful natural symbols. Guests are welcomed by a light blue carpeted foyer that mirrors the image of a full moon reflected in the ocean.

The spa's 10 treatment rooms are among the largest in the city, and offer glimpses of the dramatic skyscrapers and sky above. Five of the rooms feature a shower, a bath and a private restroom, and two of them are large enough to accommodate couples treatments. One of this facility's delights is a hidden relaxation room behind a seamless door in the treatment area, where clients can relax completely in private.

Clients can choose treatments from an extensive a la carte menu of body, facial and hand offerings. Each service is provided in secluded, serene rooms filled with softly lit candles and tropical flowers floating in relaxing hydrotherapy pools. The Mizuki Spirit (240 minutes, \$437), a signature spa ritual, begins with a deep soak for two in a traditional Japanese *Hinoki* cypress tub, a foot massage, the Bamboo and Essence Massage, a facial, and a traditional Japanese tea ceremony with *matcha*—a powdered green tea.

What a view

Across town, in the financial district of Nihonbashi, The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo is the city's other major player. Occupying the 36th floor, this hotel takes advantage of breathtaking views. The 179 luxurious guest rooms and suites set a contemporary tone that conveys harmony and serenity while reflecting Japan's timeless artisanship. The location also is the first

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time that Mandarin Oriental's award-winning spa concept has been brought to the Land of the Rising Sun.

Tradition, quality and innovation—the hotel's core values—are combined with a mission to delight and satisfy every guest. This is evident in the spa's space, which is situated on the top two floors of the tower. From the facility's nine luxurious and serene private rooms—including five private suites—guests can take in the views. The couples treatment room features an adjoining relaxation area. The spa decor combines indigenous materials and symbols to create a unique Japanese feeling. The vast space also contains a vitality pool, water lounges, a dry sauna and a crystal steam room.

At the Mandarin Oriental, the client's experience is emphasized. Guests indulge in personalized journeys created from more than 40 heat and water treatments. The spa clientele consists of 80% hotel guests and 20% local residents, and most are of Japanese descent. Services emphasize Asian tradition and Western modalities. Clients are invited to arrive up to an hour before an appointment to begin their spa escape. This includes being presented with a pair of slippers to signify the departure from the outside world.

Oriental Harmony (110 minutes, \$546) involves a foot ritual, full-body exfoliation and a special four-handed massage featuring signature oil. Clients can select from an array of indigenous treatments that are exclusive to the Tokyo location, such as the Absolute Pearl (80 minutes, \$251) illuminating therapy that brightens

and softens the skin, or the Adzuki Ritual (110 minutes, \$364), which conditions the skin with a body scrub of adzuki beans, sesame seeds and sea salt, followed by a moisturizing oil treatment.

Internal and external balance

Following in the footsteps of its Japanese neighbors, Mandara Spa at JW Marriott Hotel Shanghai is located in the Nanjing district—the center of Chinese commerce. In this new resort in the Tomorrow Square building, the hotel spirals into the sky with incredible 56th-floor penthouse views. As Mandara's flagship location, it is the first of three spas opening in China. Designed in keeping with the local flavor and tradition of old Shanghai, the decor blends with nearby colonial concessions. Private showers, raw-wood floors and rough-hewn stone accents offer an escape to busy clients.

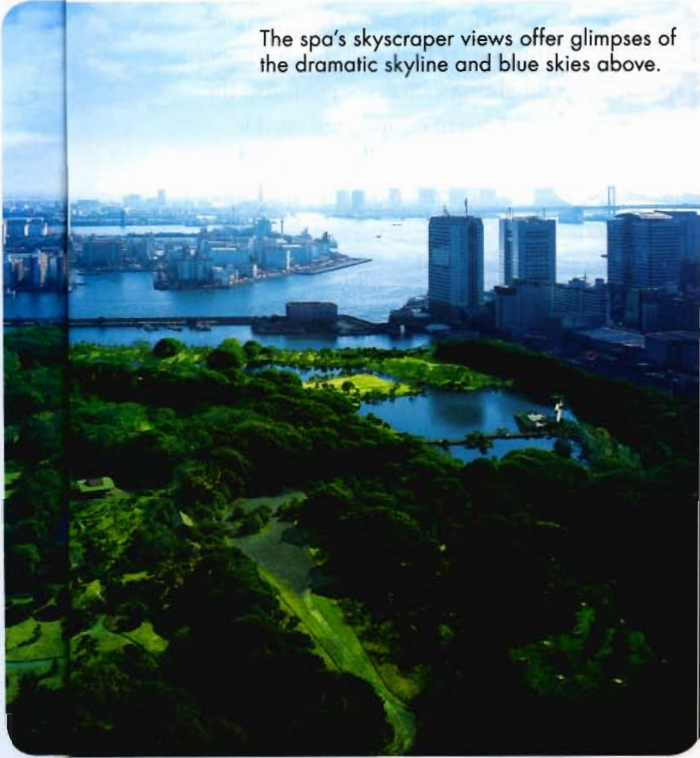
Treatments at Mandara Spa are based on a combination of European and Asian philosophies, and feature ingredients such as rice, Chinese spices and jasmine. A single therapist provides all of the client's services during their visit in order to ensure a continuous flow of experience. At the conclusion of the appointment, a local tea is served. Clients also can use the hotel's fitness facilities during their spa time as an added benefit of the Mandara experience.

The Chinese culture is moving readily toward a spa lifestyle and taking advantage of treatments that balance inner and outer health. Local residents have a strong desire for status, as well as a longing to belong to an exclusive group. The spa's clientele is an equal balance of hotel guests and local residents, and the facility's marketing is targeted heavily to the surrounding community. With the unpredictable influx of foreign and local business professionals, the spa is seeing the rewards of a loyal following.

All the difference

One of the distinct benefits at these spas is the ongoing therapist training. Before opening, the initial team at the Mandarin Oriental

The spa's skyscraper views offer glimpses of the dramatic skyline and blue skies above.



Clients are transported to a serene environment where they can forget their outside troubles.



Many Asian treatment rooms allow for multiple treatments to take place, as well as accommodate couples therapies.



Regional Treatment Trends



Eddie Leong is the owner of Zendals, an international product distributor with a strong base in Asia. "U.S. spas can learn to emphasize a spa atmosphere that incorporates natural, serene elements and utilizes the principles of feng shui," he says. Leong goes on to explain how highlighting such decor reinforces the purpose of the client's visit, which is to escape from outside distractions. "The emphasis should be on wellness first and beauty second," he asserts. "More energy-based therapies should be incorporated to complement the Western modalities. It also should be consistent with the spa philosophy of combining pampering wellness esthetics with a memorable experience that is anticipated for the next appointment." Following are Leong's observations on regional spa trends throughout Asia

● China

- Modalities emphasize Oriental Medical Therapies (OMT) or Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), which consist of "chi" corrections for regulating flow and balancing yin and yang.
- Traditional services include hot steam and herbal baths, acupuncture, and reflexology.
- Unique offerings include Tui Na massage—a dry-pressure massage at the pressure points, connective tissues and joints that stimulates energy flow; and Chi Kung, an exercise and meditation practice similar to martial arts that strengthens chi and balances yin and yang, as well as the mind-body-spirit connection.
- Herbal medicine, including pills, tonics, powders and teas, also is available.
- The spa space is serene and roomy, and incorporates the natural surroundings with feng shui—including all five elements—to balance the body energy (internal) with the surrounding elements (external).

● India

- Treatments include moist herbal wraps; herbal enemas; shirodara; herbal steam baths; and herbal oil, exfoliating and deep-muscular massages.
- In addition, ayurveda—a government-recognized system of healing and health care, and yoga—a holistic health system, are featured on spa menus.
- The spa space is grand, serene and roomy, emphasizing the natural surroundings.

● Indonesia

- Treatments include dry and oil massages, rice-based skin rubs, floral purification baths, beauty rituals, coning, cupping and jamu—herbal remedies used internally and externally for health and beauty.
- Herbal beverages and tonics also are available.

● Japan

- Treatments include bathing rituals, such as hot springs, mineral and enzyme baths; skin scrubbing; shiatsu massage; and tea ceremonies.
- The spa facilities emphasize a Zen-like decor, such as water basins, with ample room. Spa services take place in natural settings whenever possible.

● Malaysia

- Treatments include the Muslim bathing festival, spiritual and massage therapies, herbal remedies, and floral baths.

● Maldives

- Modalities focus on Unani Traditional Medicine, which is similar to ayurveda and practiced by Muslim *hakims*, or physicians.
- Treatments include bath therapies, massages, exercise programs, herbology, dietetics, cupping, sweating, ripening and purging—therapies that use herbs and fruits at their peak stage to thoroughly cleanse the body of impurities.

● Thailand

- Treatments include herbal steams distilled into the treatment room, detoxifying herbal compresses, *naui namman*—a body oil ceremony, and reflexology.
- In addition, Thai yoga and herbal therapies, as well as *naud boran*—a Thai yoga massage based on natural healing aspects, are featured on spa menus.
- The spa space is serene and roomy, and features natural surroundings. Facilities are treated as temples for healing and education.

● Vietnam

- Treatments include acupuncture, acupressure, coning—a massage therapy technique administered as a mild dermabrasion, cupping as a circular contusion, pinching, and steaming to detoxify various energy points and to stimulate the lymphatic system.
- In addition, herbal and patent medicines, or packaged powdered medicines from Thailand and China that are mixed or boiled with water and taken for a prescribed ailment, are available.
- The spa space is roomy.

This traditional Japanese tub is made from the *Hinoki* cypress conifer tree.



Clean lines, natural elements and a Zen-like decor emphasize traditional Asian themes.

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Learn a lesson

What can the United States learn from Asia? Asian spas offer first-class treatment in every aspect—from the initial greeting to departure with endless smiles from team members. The practice of adding a gratuity to a service also is not customary in Asian cultures, making customer service even more crucial. In addition, it instills a sense of pride to provide hospitality and service, which is an integral part of social etiquette and manners.

For some insight on specific trends that are being incorporated at these spas, see **Regional Treatment Trends**. The success of these Asian spas strongly indicates how holistic approaches and exemplary customer service can create a thriving spa concept. From Zen-based decor to a combination of Eastern and Western modalities, the spa industry's Eastern counterparts are raising the bar when it comes to quality standards. X

and Mandara Spa underwent more than three months of customer service and treatment training in order to consistently deliver the quality for which these facilities are renowned. All therapists hold internationally recognized licenses, and the professionals from Japan and China attend school for more than two years to acquire accreditation. The teams also are entirely female because the field draws primarily women, and both female and male clients feel most comfortable with a female therapist. This unique composition is found at all three locations researched for this article.

One major difference with our Asian counterparts is a dedication to following service protocols precisely. The mind-set gives priority to following and adhering to these structured steps. The Japanese clientele, in particular, enjoys it when a treatment is explained and will follow through with at-home instructions. Prebooking and retail recommendation also are integrated into the therapist's service. Thus, spas enjoy rapid success with little employee turnover.