

Writer Nicole Webb

All Natural

Spa treatments are going au naturel again as scientists and spa owners rediscover Mother Nature's many wonderful gifts



In today's ever increasingly high-octane society, when it comes to health and well-being not to mention looking good, there's a smell of change in the spa room air. It seems things are turning full circle with natural ingredients once again stealing the spotlight in the spa arena.

NATURE VERSES NURTURE

"We've all heard about potentially harmful chemical anti-ageing agents that can be absorbed through the skin. Now, the tide has turned to natural, earthy treatments that have been tried and tested by women over centuries," says Spa Director Eric Tan at Ikeda Spa Prestige, Clark Quay, Singapore.

With the realisation that products derived from naturally sourced ingredients may be more suitable and gentler for all skin types, it's about using those ingredients Mother Nature has gifted us.

Ikeda Spa's Geisha Organic Facial is turning heads with its deep-cleansing and skin-softening paste made from powdered nightingale droppings or *uguisu no fun* in

Japanese. This beauty elixir has become a runaway bestseller and includes ingredients that have been traditionally used for beauty care in Japan for centuries.

In a world overwhelmed by technology, Spa Director at The Peninsula Spa Hong Kong, Sharon Codner says, "There's an increasing search for healthier ways of living."

"Aromatherapy oils were widely used for health and well-being until the late 1920s when penicillin was discovered and have now made a huge comeback." She says, "In the past ten to 15 years, there's been a boom in the use of natural products, as an example coconut oil has swept the world with its skin and hair conditioning benefits."

Many spa therapists believe achieving the best beauty outcome is about connecting the two – a perfect combination of cosmeceuticals and natural ingredients.

Flawless Spa in Hong Kong uses Medik8 Cosmeceutical as well as Aromatherapy Associates products in its treatments. Most people automatically see the latter as the 'natural' brand, but Flawless Spa Director Sandra Grau says that's not quite true.

"Medik8 is considered a cosmeceutical brand that derives most of its ingredients from natural sources. Apart from a general appetite from skincare users towards natural and organic cosmetics, it just so happens that some of the finest ingredients used in today's cosmeceuticals are actually derived from natural sources."

There is an emerging field of science called 'green chemistry' that uses more environmental- and skin-friendly manufacturing techniques, particularly when it comes to the production and extraction of actives.

BACK TO BASICS

It's not just facial treatments that are going 'au naturel' – body massages are also getting in on the 'pure product' action.

The Reverie Saigon Spa's Hot Stone massage is paving the way with hand-harvested, certified organic seaweed. The Voya range is all about using centuries of acquired wisdom from the sea, to bring your body the full power of nature's force.

It's these ancient discoveries and ingredients used by our great grandmothers and those before them that appear to be working magic when it comes to detoxifying and rejuvenating the skin and body.

At Talise Ottoman Spa in the Middle East, it's all about coffee. The Coffee Peeling massage is an innovative Hammam treatment that uses Turkish coffee to refine and smooth skin tone. Assistant Spa Director, Loan Sandor says, "We are keen on using the best natural ingredients at Talise Ottoman Spa. Coffee is a great one for the skin as it not only detoxifies but has many other health benefits like improving circulation and curing skin disorders."

At the Banyan Tree Spa in Vietnam, there is a growing trend towards using local produce. Cajuput oil, traditionally known

for its healing benefits, is being used in their most well-loved spa package. The Ginger Jasmine Rice Enhancer has, you guessed it, freshly made ginger, jasmine rice, milk, olive oil and cajuput oil.

Kanruethai Roongruang, VP/Executive Director of Spa Operations for Banyan Tree Spa & Gallery worldwide says, at Banyan Tree Spas it's about offering guests a sanctuary for the senses.

"To achieve this, the spa focuses on a non-clinical and holistic approach based on traditional Eastern healing therapies. It emphasises a 'high-touch, low-tech' approach that celebrates the human touch and the use of natural herbs and spices."

W Hong Kong's Bliss Spa Director Jane Wang agrees there's a movement for spas to use products found in nature, blended together or used individually to make the most of their ingredients.

"Natural products are used to detoxify, purify and rejuvenate the skin and body. Whether it's in facial products, body scrubs, steam baths or the infusion teas to enjoy after your treatment. Some of these products are blended just before using, adapted to your own skin's requirements."

Some of the best natural ingredients on the market include carrot mulch – best known for containing vitamin A, proven highly effective in dealing with acne, help heal pimples and sores, plump up skin cells for a younger appearance and slowing down the signs of ageing caused by free radicals and environmental damage.

Sesame seed is being hailed as a great soother while sesame seed oil has healing properties useful in the repair of damaged skin cells and for skin rejuvenation.

Of course, honey is renowned for its antibacterial properties, still considered to be one of the best natural acne-fighting ingredients.

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~ Eric Tan


A HEALING TOUCH

Avista Hideaway Resort in Phuket likes to focus on healing therapies at their Avista Spa. Part of the regime includes using Adolia – a recognised manufacturer in aromatherapy oils – who has for over ten years developed a network of specialty oils produced throughout Thailand. At Avista Spa, the menu reads like a list of restaurant appetizers, including things like the Coconut Ginger Scrub or the Kaffir Lime and Yoghurt Scrub.

Meanwhile, The Peninsula Spa in Hong Kong has launched a Vedic Aromatherapy spa treatment line Sattva by Simply Peninsula. Sattva means 'purity' with the oils and products used made in Australia.

In creating the range, Subtle Energies has sourced pure ingredients directly from growers and distillers around the world. Spa Director Codner says, "These cruelty-free, natural skincare products are created without the addition of parabens, mineral oils, silicones or artificial fragrances and are designed to address a variety of skin and body concerns."

The GHM Singapore is putting its energy into, well, energy. It recently began spa treatments that target the body's chakras or energy centres. The 75-minute, spine-focused session follows the energy flow rather than manipulating muscles – using essential oils and plant extracts which include cardamom and patchouli.

Brenda Ramen, Director of Spas at GHM says, "The global trend towards using organic botanicals as the active ingredients in spa products is definitely gaining momentum. Consumer education is driving demand; it is now generally accepted that toxic chemicals in our food and cosmetic products are detrimental to our health. Thus the desire for pure active botanical ingredients." 



Sattva by Simply Peninsula, created by Australian brand Subtle Energies, has sourced pure ingredients directly from all over the world to create cruelty-free, natural products