

BACK BEAUTY:
Slough your skin to
flawlessness with Aroma
Cleanse Exfoliating Body
Cream by Décleor, £27.50.
The combination of micro
beads and sweet almond oil
keeps skin irresistibly
smooth. Follow with
Décleor's hydrating Aroma
Confort Systeme Corps
Moisturising Body Milk,
£35, the perfect quencher
for parched skin.



at the feet of the master

Whether their power comes from the ritual itself, or the master practitioner behind it, ancient spa practices remain as popular as they have been for centuries. PORTER seeks out the global beauty traditions that deliver timeless results

Photography by Chris Colls

THE JAPANESE INN AND BATH HOUSE

Hiiragiya, Kyoto, Japan

THE HEALING TRADITION: The bathing and purification practice is such an obsession in Japan that centuries ago it became both secular and second nature, seeping into popular consciousness. Traditionally, bath houses and *ryokans* (inns) were utilitarian and often inexpensive, offering mineral-rich baths to soothe weary travelers. Hiiragiya in Kyoto is a sixth-generation, family-run inn with 28 immaculate tatami-mat bedrooms, featuring painted folding screens and reed ceilings. While it stays true to a beguiling medley of Japanese customs and courtesies, which have remained nearly unchanged for most of its 200 years, it is more luxe than basic in both setting and interior comforts. As Kyoto's most respected *ryokan*, Hiiragiya has long been the destination of choice for members of the royal family, politicians and even Elizabeth Taylor, all of whom have sought the restorative powers of its *hadaka-no-tsukiai*, a uniquely Japanese concept that translates roughly as 'bathing kinship'.

THE RITUAL: Stepping over the threshold, the sense of welcome is instantaneous – an inscription by the door reads: 'It is our wish that on arrival you feel as if you are coming home.' I'm encouraged to languish in my room until a kimono-clad attendant runs a deep cedar tub full of soothing spring water, known as 'water for beautiful skin', which is kept hot with a wooden lid. In keeping with the ritual, I wash with soap before entering the bath, using the faucet and a small wooden bucket, then soak in the tub. Water pours enticingly over the edge on immersion; the heat instantly relaxes my muscles, while the soft cedar soothes when it comes into contact with my skin and creates a sweet, fresh scent that spreads through the room. After a tranquil soak, I slip into the *yukata* (traditional cotton robe) that has been laid out for me to wear to dinner. My attendant proceeds to serve an exquisite in-room *kaiseki* feast (a traditional multi-course meal) with sake, before preparing my soft futon bed for a deep and blissful sleep. (hiiragiya.co.jp) *By Stephanie Plentl*

spa special

THE YOGI

Dr Shine Babu, Shillim, India

THE HEALER: Wealthy Mumbaikars head to Shillim, three hours south of the city, for the transformational skills of Dr Shine, a former student of the late yogi B. K. S. Iyengar. Dr Shine begins sessions with the first lesson of yoga and meditation therapy, the breath, and can convert even the most meditation-averse client into a serene being emanating good will and energy. **THE EXPERIENCE:** Learning to control your breathing is a powerful tool for combating stress and bolstering the immune system. In the outdoor pavilion, between mango and neem trees, everything seems bathed in an endorphin-charged glow. Even the birds trill in response to Dr Shine's "I am happy" incantation that begins the practice. Sessions are intense; I am sweating like I've run 10 miles and crying with unlocked emotions. At dusk we relocate to a meditation cave, where the concentration of crystals (and "good energy") is the densest. Dr Shine's closing "Om" echoes into infinity. Mine starts as a damp squib, but as the week progresses and my lungs grow stronger, I too can hold the chant and lose myself in a flowing slipstream of sound. (*shillimretreatandspa.hilton.com*) *By Catherine Fairweather*

THE REVITALIZING HAMMAM

Royal Mansour, Marrakech, Morocco

THE HEALING TRADITION: The hammam is a weekly, communal Arab ritual, a time for gossip as well as purifying (think vigorous scrubs, mineral-clay body masks and steam). Most hotels and riads in Marrakech offer their own version, from the basic and communal to the ultra-luxe and private. Royal Mansour, the hotel palace commissioned by the King of Morocco, is the antithesis of a traditional boudoir hammam, with its white marble, airy space and soaring domed ceiling with plasterwork that looks like lace. **THE RITUAL:** In the lofty, pillared inner sanctum, I lie on a heated marble slab while Luna, the masseuse, cradles my neck like a baby's while scrubbing me with buttery black soap. It is a strange experience being naked in the arms of a stranger, but once I overcome my sense of reserve, the act of letting go is as intoxicating as the hammam's spiritual, sensual and aesthetic pleasure. As the room builds up a steam, Luna sluices me with buckets of tepid water before exfoliating my skin with a body mitt. Finally, I am hosed down, shampooed, dunked in cool water, wrapped in a towel and left with mint tea to drift off and dream. (*royalmansour.com*) *By Catherine Fairweather*

THE MYSTIC GURU

Tina Cutler, Ibiza & London

THE HEALER: Ibiza's special energy has long drawn healers, with Tina Cutler being the favorite of the party set as well as London's overworked. After decades learning the art, including a stint under renowned dowser-healer Derek Talbot, her signature treatment combines reiki, reflexology, craniosacral therapy and vibrational medicine, which together work to harmonize body and mind. **THE EXPERIENCE:** Before the treatment began Cutler gave me a blindfold and headphones with the sound of rain playing. She placed crystals on my body and then, using her mixture of healing, worked on my energy channels. I felt spiritually stripped back as she targeted my body's weak points with uncanny precision. My diagnosis involved a problem with my throat chakra and solar plexus, which can indicate a lack of self-assuredness. Cutler placed a bespoke remedy on my meridian points and instructed me to use it for the next three days. The treatment finished with a grounding reflexology massage. I left feeling disorientated, but the next day felt euphoric, strong and confident. A month on, I still feel the deeply enlightening effects of the treatment. (*tinacutlerholistics.com*) *By Delilah Khomo*

THE HOLISTIC CHINESE REMEDY

Dr Chui Shui Hon, Hong Kong

THE HEALER: A practice stretching back over 2,000 years, TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) is based on Chinese concepts for the elements that keep the body healthy, and includes therapies such as acupuncture, herbal medicine and massage. With a double PhD in TCM and biochemistry and as president of Asia's Anti-Aging Association, Dr Chui combines TCM and Western medicine to treat ailments harmoniously. **THE RITUAL:** I suffered from acute eczema and had been prescribed steroids that had helped in the short term, but did not stop the condition from re-occurring. At my initial consultation, Dr Chui checked my pulse and tongue (strong indicators of disharmony) and analyzed my daily routine. In TCM, the metal element and lungs govern skin, so he looked for signs of weak lungs, frequent colds and shortness of breath. I was told to cut out drying components of my diet – coffee, sugar, alcohol and spicy foods – and prescribed four Chinese herbs that were ground into a fine powder to dissolve in water. After a week of drinking the tincture daily, my skin became clearer and smoother, and the inflammation had all but disappeared. Four months later, my eczema was gone. (*moderntcm.com.hk*) *By Alison Pei*

the purifiers

Deep-acting treatments for an outer glow



Thermal Cleansing Balm by Omorovicza, £46



Neem and Coconut Hair Treatment Oil by Sundari, £25



Hammam Hot Scrub by Rituals, £19.50



Giving Beauty Argan Oil by Kahina, £74



Toning Essence by Su Man, £37