

The Filipino Healing Touch

BY SUNSHINE DE LEON

The healing hands of this spa retreat will not only pamper your body but will also lead your soul into tropical bliss.

I have never been, what I refer to as, a “spa girl”. I appreciate a good massage just like most people do, but I have never shared the desire to visit a special place to have my body pampered for hours at a time. I have never understood the difference between a body scrub and a wrap and had no clue how to choose the right essential oil. After experiencing the truly healing powers of the Mt. Banahaw spa package available at Tirta Spa on Boracay Island however, I must say that I have had a complete change of heart- and it's quite possible I might end up a spa believer after all. This 3-hour pampering of the body, mind and soul, otherwise known as the “Filipino Healing Touch”, is exactly what its name implies. I say this with certainty because I arrived at the spa suffering from the stuffy head and body aches usually signifying the beginnings of the flu, and left being able to breathe clearly and feeling quite ready to conquer my full day of work that lay ahead.

The treatment is named after the island's dormant volcano, Mt. Banahaw, a place considered by local residents to be a holy site where holy voices have been heard. As spa owner En Calvert says, “All herbs I chose to use are found on the slopes of this sacred mountain. They possess particularly therapeutic qualities and will assist in rebalancing life, body and soul as well as achieving detoxification.” She continues on to explain her underlying goal, “It was vital to consider not only the benefits in terms of beauty but also to create a ritual that would emphasize the principles of ancient Philippine remedies practiced by so many generations over the centuries.”

My arrival at the foot of the steps leading to the hilltop perched temple like spa is announced by the echoing sound of a gong, and my mind, which had been running in several directions at once, immediately pauses in its

own thought. I follow the Buddha statues leading to the spa pavilion, cross a koi pond set amidst lush green landscape and am led to a private villa decorated with a blend of design elements brought from Indonesia, Thailand, India and the Philippines. My healing experience commences with a foot massage, designed to be a grounding experience of bringing one back to nature, and as each of my toes is gently scrubbed, my thoughts move into the direction of silence.

Thoughts let go

As I lay down on the massage table, I inhale the calming scent of the ginger and calamansi body scrub, a selection that the therapist had specifically recommended I use because ginger balances internal heat and cold for soothing internal energy and colds. The fact that calamansi clarifies and exfoliates dead skin was an added benefit. At the scrub's first touch to my skin, I am soothed by a delightful warm tingle and as I feel the scrub gliding onto my skin, I truly can imagine that layers of any negative experiences in my life are being scrubbed away.







With this thought in mind, I am led to the Vichy shower, where laying face down on a bed, I am both massaged and cleansed by the pressure points of water streaming from above. A therapeutic herbal tea bath follows and as I immerse myself into an over-sized mosaic tiled hot tub filled with yellow and white flowers, I realize then that water, whether still or flowing, can heal in so many ways. The teas used in this treatment are known for their antiseptic qualities, helping to lower cholesterol, improving the digestive and respiratory systems, correcting hormonal imbalances, and lifting depression. After a few minutes of closing my eyes and just letting my sense of smell and touch take over, a mixture of hot tea is slowly poured on my back, and somewhere between this rejuvenating sensation and the smoothing scent of the mix of tanglad, sambong, manzanilla and banaba leaves, my body, mind and soul let out one great big “aaahhh” of relief.

My bath is followed by a moisturizing exotic Pandan body wrap. Its selected because these leaves, coming from the Screw pine tree, penetrate deeply into your body and have healing powers against skin diseases, and Pandan roots are known to have anti-diabetic elements. As the wrap is smoothed onto my skin, I feel as if all my thoughts have disappeared and all I can do is “feel” beauty.



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The last stage of my magnificent experience is an ancient Filipino therapeutic and chiropractic massage called "Hilot." The only first aid Filipinos knew of many years ago, this massage starts with the therapist scanning your back in search of any imbalances in the body. I find myself in a trance-like slumber as the therapist slowly applies pressure to the most stressed parts of my body, using the healing powers of the eucalyptus and lavender blend of oil as additional therapy. These ingredients seemed the perfect choice since they are known to be good for the respiratory system, provide immunity to fevers, and are good for mental exhaustion and soothing muscular aches.

As I hear the gentle chime of a bell ringing three times, I remove my eye pillow and awake to find myself truly feeling a regained sense of balance. As I sip a cup of native Sambong tea, a finishing touch meant to cleanse you from within, I reflect on something a visiting foreign tourist once said to me about the Philippines. This friend loved the country because she found the engaging warmth of the Filipino smile always made her feel happy. I feel a special sense of pride as I realize my lesson of the day- not only can the Filipinos heal with their smile but they do it with their touch as well.

SPA TRAVEL NOTES

TIRTA SPA

Sitio Malabunot, Manoc-Manoc,
Boracay Island, Malay, Aklan
(63 36) 260 24 88
www.tirtaspa.com

OPERATING HOURS: Tirta Spa is open daily from
9:00 AM – 12:00 MIDNIGHT

OTHER TREATMENTS:

- *Tirta Signature Massage*
(1 hour and 30 minutes, Php2,750)
A fusion of Swedish, lymphatic drainage and reflexology massages, this soft yet indulging massage is an experience you'll never forget. Guests can choose from a different selection of aroma therapeutic oils to not only enjoy their treatments but also help in relaxing their muscles.
- *Before and After Sun Treatment (both treatments are 2 hours and 30 minutes, both are Php 6,800)*
Before you apply your sun protection cream and head for the beach, be sure to experience a head-to-toe exfoliation, preparing your skin for that even all-over Sun Goddess tan.
Boracay Sunrise: Before hitting the sun - facial and body exfoliation and the Tirta Signature body massage

Boracay Sunset: to hydrate your skin. The treatment calls for a body and facial mask using pink clay, then a light massage to soothe the muscles and heal the skin.

- *Secrets of Egypt (4 hours, Php 11,000)*
Imagine the pleasure of stepping into an over-sized, crystal mosaic tile bathtub and immersing your body in hot water perfumed with a selection of freshly cut flowers. Completely mesmerized, you are watching the gentle rhythm of the calacucci, gumamela, and roses floating by when you feel the relaxing nourishment of a mixture of warm milk with honey being slowly poured over your body from a beautiful Indian bronze pitcher. A massage is one thing but finishing off with a Cleopatra-inspired Egyptian Milk Bath (which comes as part of 2-3 hour spa packages) elevates you from heaven to nirvana!

HOW TO GET THERE:

The spa is located at Sitio Malabunot, after the local fire station. Just ask the habal-habal (tricycle) to take you there. For those who have confirmed booking you can arrange for a shuttle transfer (Php 100/person) to their location.

