




Condé Nast
Traveller
UK EDITION

THE
SPA GUIDE
2014

Condé Nast Traveller

THE SPA AWARDS 2014

IN ASSOCIATION WITH Healing  Holidays



WINNER

MOST SOULFUL SPA

SONG SAA, CAMBODIA

WIN A WEEK AT ONE OF THAILAND'S TOP HEALTH RETREATS

Condé Nast Traveller

THE BEST SPAS IN THE WORLD 2014

YOGA IN INDIA

ANTI-AGEING IN THE ALPS

DETOXING IN OMAN

WEIGHT LOSS IN FRANCE

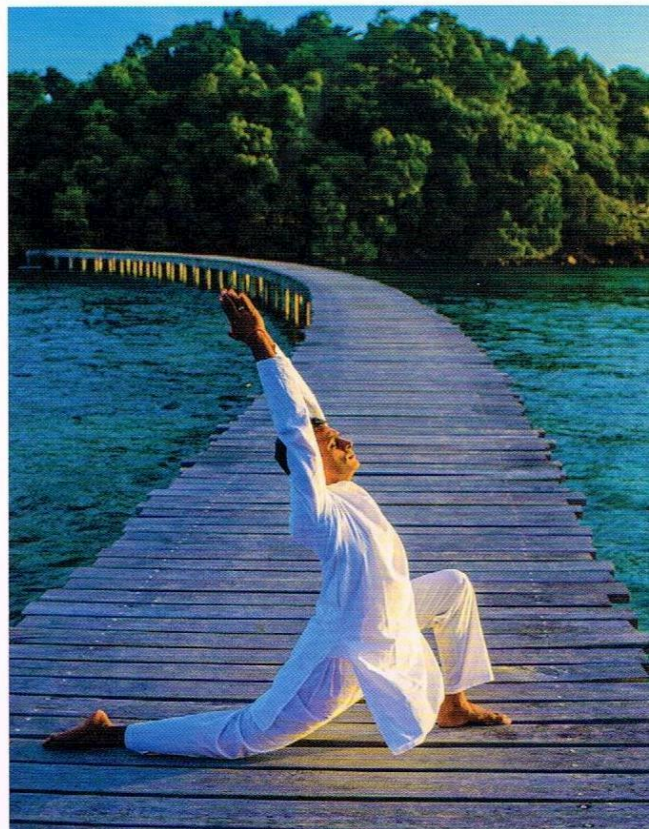
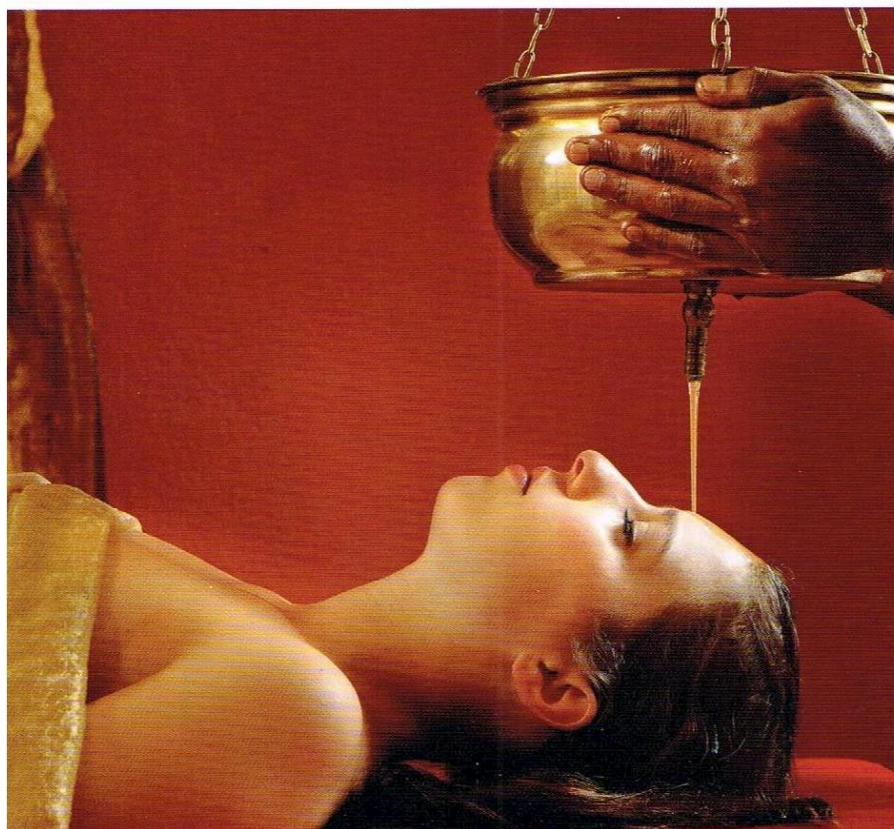
GETTING FIT IN THE USA

+THE MAYR CLINICS ASSESSED



THE SPA GUIDE

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THE SPA GUIDE

When did you last go dancing? Or watch the sun rise? Or feel free and light and easy and energised? Most of us are juggling more than ever before. An alarming and growing number of us are tired, if not exhausted, for much of the time. The lines on your face, that sore back, those tension headaches, that annoying bit of flab around your bottom, those bitten fingernails, that end-of-day desire for a glass of wine or sneaky cigarette, even those recurrent 2am wakings – all are telling you that recharging your battery is fundamental to your health. And spas are about just that: learning to look after yourself. They are not just a flight of fancy, or an expensive over-indulgence (which is why, along with our pick of the top new-to-the scene players, we've also included some good-value options). The spas in this guide are about taking stock, rebooting, rebuilding. Some are the ultimate in tuning out, others are truly educational, even life-changing. And we are supported by the outstanding knowledge of the most esteemed spa tour operator out there, Healing Holidays, which offers not only bespoke, personalised and – most importantly – impartial advice on where would truly suit you, but also the best deals on the best programmes, which you won't find anywhere else. Perhaps in no other area of travel is the wisdom of a tour operator so crucial. You shouldn't starve and over-exercise if really what your body needs is rest and recuperation. Healing Holidays knows its properties, and it is masterful at gently matching you to the right spa in the right part of the world on a journey that won't wipe you out or leave you wondering if it was worth the money. There's no time to make mistakes when it comes to your health. This is the new *Condé Nast Traveller Spa Guide*. Our reviews are the most honest, detailed and authoritative you will find; a good massage isn't nearly good enough for us.

DAISY FINER, SPA GUIDE EDITOR

THIS YEAR'S WINNERS

BEST NEW DESTINATION SPA VANA, INDIA

MOST EFFECTIVE REBOOT SIX SENSES ZIGHY BAY, OMAN

BEST VALUE FOR WEIGHT LOSS ABSOLUTE SANCTUARY, THAILAND

MOST SOULFUL SPA SONG SAA, CAMBODIA

BEST HEALTHY HIDEAWAY VAMIZI ISLAND, MOZAMBIQUE

MOST AVANT-GARDE CLINIC LONHEA, SWITZERLAND

MOST CONSISTENT HIGH PERFORMER IN: SPA

ON THE COVER: CHEVAL BLANC SPA, CHEVAL BLANC RANDHELI, MALDIVES PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARY ROZZI STYLED BY FIONA LINTOTT HAIR AND MAKE-UP: RUTH WARRIOR USING GUERLAIN TERRACOTTA BRONZING MIST MODEL: AMBER ANDERSON BIKINI: LISA MARIE FERNANDEZ

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**MOST
SOULFUL
SPA**

SONG SAA KOH RONG ARCHIPELAGO, CAMBODIA

IN BRIEF Gentle treatments with a strong ethical spirit

THE LOWDOWN Until now, Cambodia's star spa players have been situated in or around Siem Reap; there's Amansara – a low-key sanctuary where you should try the Temple Walk, a zingy peppermint scrub for tired feet – and the Prince D'Angkor, a slice of boutique peace. But this is something else, something dazzling. Song Saa (Khmer for 'the sweethearts') consists of two gem-like islands in the otherwise untouched Koh Rong Archipelago in the Gulf of Thailand. Getting here is an adventure, but when you arrive by speedboat on the last leg of your mega-journey and the first hut looms into view, it becomes clear that the trek is worthwhile. There is nothing else around. The island of Koh Ouen is home to 27 eco-villas of a standard as yet unseen in this part of the world (the strong sustainable ethos has inspired the stylish reworking of old fishing-boat timber and driftwood into furniture). And wild and hilly Koh Bong, reached by a winding bridge, has meditation platforms and yoga salas. It is hard to believe the sparkling spot was so neglected and littered when Australian owners Melita and Rory Hunter – who had been doing up houses on the mainland – began their plans for Song Saa eight years ago. It's been a long ride, fraught with unforeseen obstacles (including Melita's diagnosis with cancer and the Lehman Brothers crash, which dramatically affected funding) so that the project was nearly abandoned. But the couple's dream was eventually realised and their relentless creativity continues with their commitment to improving the local environment and the lives of nearby villagers. Behind-the-scenes initiatives such as The Boat of Hope project, which aims to get healthcare and education to 30 remote islands (which appear to be entirely neglected by the government), lend integrity and authenticity to the spa ethos. Jungle villas enjoy gobsmacking views, while in the water villas you can watch the fish through the floor and dive straight into a clear sea from the private deck. The castors run smoothly and silently but are not over-polished, allowing the island's natural charm to shine through and bringing you closer to the sea, the sun and the stars without too much fanfare. Guests are rarely disturbed and instead receive tiny *Alice In Wonderland*-style notes: 'Pour this', 'Drink this' and 'Try this' are the instructions for the indulgent Stillness Bath Ritual, which involves bathing in milk, oil and petals, sipping ginger tea and nibbling on a mini macaroon. Small scrolls are tucked into your door, inviting you to feasts across the island: Khmer curries by the pool with your toes dipped in cool water, or sea-bass ceviche on a swing bed in the Vista Restaurant. There's plenty of natural and organic produce from the local rainforests and farms, but also moreish wood-fired pizzas at the Driftwood Bar for when you feel the need. The spa reception area is swathed in muslin, orchids and lotus flowers, with sea-green painted boards salvaged from a derelict railway, and herby honey tea that is divine; treatment areas are dotted around the island. Therapies are managed by Narayana Prasad, for whom every day is 'wonderful'. Slip off for massages devised by Ila, the organic British brand whose philosophy, based around the Buddhist tenets of metta and karuna (loving kindness and compassion), reflects the principles of Song Saa. Try the Ananda Facial, where gentle pressure is applied to the marma points of the face and pure damask-rose products are used, or a Himalayan salt scrub and hot-stone chakra massage performed to the sound of the beating waves at night. There is a subtlety to the therapists' touch here that works in a profound way, and hands and feet are enclosed in piping hot towels at the end of each treatment to ground you. This is a spa with soul, which sets it apart from the pack.

INSIDER TIP Try the underwater meditation, which involves floating in shallow waters looking up at the stars – you don't have to be a scuba diver.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; www.healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers seven nights from £3,450 full board, including flights and transfers.

PHOTOGRAPH: JENNY ZARINS

GRAND PARK HOTEL BAD HOFGASTEIN, AUSTRIA

IN BRIEF Weird but wonderfully reparative radon caves

THE LOWDOWN Just standing in the utter greenness of the Bad Hofgastein valley, surrounded by craggy peaks, is enough to make you feel better. But this valley – or rather, the mountains that fringe it – guards a secret: Gasteiner Heilstollen, the world's only healing caves with naturally occurring radon gas. This location has been used by Austrians and Germans for centuries to cure everything from hay fever to broken bones and arthritis, and health insurance companies send patients here for a natural remedy that's cheaper and more effective than conventional medicine. Spa-treatment programmes at the Grand Park Hotel are based around daily trips to these strange, sauna-like caverns where everyone strips off (though this is not compulsory, and there are separate caves for men and women) and no one talks. There are doctors on-site, but claustrophobics beware: the journey deep into the mountain, via a little plastic-seated train, feels rather ominous and there is a faint whiff of sweaty bodies. It's not the most enjoyable experience, but it brings results, including markedly reduced pain and inflammation, a boosted immune system and glowing skin. Thermal waters with a lower concentration of radon stream into the hotel's swimming pool, one drinking tap (no more than three glasses a day of the metallic-tasting water is recommended) and some of its baths. Medical staff including senior consultant Dr Liane Weber, a specialist in musculoskeletal disorders and traditional Chinese medicine, devise treatment plans to boost the body's healing ability using diet, physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, lymphatic drainage massage, tui na and acupuncture. Physio is tough, pounding out every ache and pain, but this is no bootcamp: patients are on holiday, so alcohol and cake are not off-limits, though you are gently encouraged to apply moderation. While neither sleek nor modern – despite a recent refurbishment, the look is rather fusty – the hotel does hospitality to a tee. Head chef Franz Huick will prepare food according to your personal nutrition plan, but his meals won't leave you wanting, there's flaxseed and antioxidant-rich berries for breakfast, miso soup for lunch, wolf fish with asparagus followed by buckwheat waffles and mango sorbet for supper. In addition to all the pummelling, stretching and needling, rest is essential, so boost your schedule with detoxifying mud wraps and collagen facials using QMS Medicosmetics products, or a spot of Nordic walking along the appropriately named Gasteiner Ache, the river that flows down the spine of the valley. If you have a serious complaint, expect to return with renewed vitality and needing less medication.

INSIDER TIP Help your body by fuelling it with such anti-inflammatory wizards as green tea, pumpkin seeds and seaweed.

BOOK IT Health and Fitness Travel (+44 20 3397 8891; www.healthandfitnesstravel.com) offers a seven-night Healing Caves programme from £1,670 full board, including flights and transfers.

