

Metro features team - 6th January, 2011

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Spas: Three of the best

Rest and recuperation: Kick off the new year with a little bit of TLC and some classy rubdowns from a variety of spas at home and abroad.

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Principe Forte dei Marmi hotel and spa, Tuscany, Italy

The experience: Just 45 minutes by car from Pisa airport lies the exclusive Italian beach resort of Forte dei Marmi. The likes of Prada, Armani and Gucci shops neatly frame the town centre's quaint streets, blessed by a stunning Apuan Alps backdrop and just a diamond's throw away from the Tyrrhenian Sea. In keeping with the surroundings, Principe Forte dei Marmi, an elegant 28-room hotel with spa that opened its five-star doors last July, is as excessive as it is beautiful.

The treatment: My first spa treat is an ayurvedic ritual, a full body massage which uses warm oil and smooth gentle movements. When the massage finishes I don't want to move in case I disturb my serene state. I drag myself to one of the loungers next door before relaxing in the whirlpool and taking a quick dip in the adjoining indoor swimming pool. The Bellefontaine facial comes as a welcome break the following day. As I lie there with cotton pads on my eyes and listen to the twinkling tunes softly bouncing around the room, my masseuse unexpectedly starts working on my feet, legs and thighs. Although deeply relaxed, I leave my facial feeling nothing will compare to the ayurvedic ritual that is until the final day when I have the spa's speciality – the Ila experience. This combines a salt scrub, body balm massage and soothing facial. The salt scrub, although slightly rough on the skin at times, is worth the experience. Once you shower off the salt, the full-body massage feels soft and sensual. By the time the Ananda facial is done, I'm not sure if I'm asleep or awake.

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The extras: The spa's aromatherapy shower is unmissable – cool and intoxicating purple rain mixes with warm water making for a very invigorating, cleansing experience. The hotel is beautiful with its minimal, neutral decor. My room comes with a grandiose bed, L-shaped sofa and glass bathroom stuffed full of Molton Brown products. The food is presented as if pieces of art. I've never seen an apple strudel looking so tarted up and ready to paint the town red. But it has nothing on the melt-in-your-mouth baked turbot on a bed of thinly sliced potatoes with porcini mushrooms.

The cost: Rates start from £423 per night. Spa treatments start from £94. Return easyJet flights from London Gatwick to Pisa airport are from £60. Sophie Robehmed

Dao Spa, Victoria, London

The experience: Dao Spa's ethos is to combine traditional Chinese medicinal treatments with the luxury of Western pampering. The spa employs experienced therapists, many trained in Chinese holistic therapies such as acupuncture and acupressure, taking your treatment to another level. The look is minimal, Eastern and earthy. With much of the decor and furnishings imported from China, it is an authentic pocket of Zen in central London.

The treatment: We begin with a hot cup of smoky-tasting Chinese tea followed by a tuina massage. This involves smooth, jet-black, heat retaining basalt stones being placed on areas of the body to promote relaxation. The tuina massage is an integral part of traditional Chinese medicine and has been practised for thousands of years (my therapist studied for two years to learn the technique). It is a clothes-on treatment which seeks to promote the effective flow of energy and bring the body into balance. It can be used to treat everything from overindulgence (diarrhoea, insomnia and stress) to repetitive strain injury. Although the treatment simply involved gentle pressure and rocking on my upper back, the effects were remarkable. I have received many different massages in my time but nothing has left me feeling so invigorated.

The extras: In addition to the Zen-style holistic treatments, Dao offers the usual waxing and nail painting that you might be used to at a spa. Dao also has its own range of massage and essential oils and men's clothing (if you're in the mood for some shopping after relaxing).

The cost: The tuina massage is £30 for 30min, £50 for 60min, and £70 for 90min. The hot stones massage is £60 for 60mins and £80 for 90 mins. Visit [www.1astminute.com](#) [www.dao-spa.co.uk](#).

Lucy Hallam-Eames

Es Saadi Gardens and Resort Oriental Spa, Marrakesh, Morocco

The experience: Set inside 20 acres (8hectares) of lush gardens, this new spa feels like a veritable oasis within the intense hustle and bustle of Marrakesh. The building has been designed around an enormous 100-year-old eucalyptus tree which rises from a hydrotherapy pool and spreads its leaves over a sun terrace. The view takes in everything from the city walls to the snow-capped Atlas Mountains. Es Saadi is also home to the first Dior Institute inside a spa, offering luxurious bespoke treatments with a particular emphasis on anti-ageing care.

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The treatment: The spa offers five original massages exclusively designed by physiotherapist Gil Amsallem. Its ultimate signature treatment is the epic Blissful massage where four hands work on you at once. Although I was often a bit confused as to what was going on, it completely banished every knot and imbalance in my body. I also sampled a Dior Total Radiance facial with products chosen to help my sensitive skin. At first I worried my skin looked really shiny but after a few hours my face was glowing and felt genuinely silky. Not quite relaxed to the max, I decided to try a Holistic Harmony treatment, which uses oils carefully matched to each individual's needs and operates on the nervous system through reflexology on the spine, stimulating the blood and the lymphatic system. Although I've always been a bit cynical about aromatherapy, this left me feeling utterly blissed out, fresh and at ease with the world.

The extras: Sprawling over three floors and flooded with natural light, you could happily spend hours (if not days) exploring the spa. As well as traditional hammams there are ten oriental thermae to discover, a mixture of dry and humid rooms filled with different colours and smells and inspired by a variety of treatments from around the world. I'm completely enchanted by the Galactic Steam Bath, in which the ceiling is a colour-shifting starry sky. If all the pampering leaves you feeling a bit restless, you can make use of a personal trainer in the gym, rooftop yoga mats or a power plate. There's also a restaurant serving light meals made with organic produce from the farm, which is run by the family who own the resort.

The cost: The Blissful massage, 80min, £198. Holistic Harmony, 50min, £107. Rooms are £164 a night, day prices start at £268. Visit www.essaadi.com.

Amy Dawson