



Skilled hands: The masseurs in Saigon's top spas have excellent training



Hamming it up: The Elegency is bathed in strong neon-like colours

and help them with stress management."

And that is exactly what they do here – nothing is hurried or stressed. The smiling staff float around in their lavender and white outfits, essential oils burn in every corner and relaxing music follows you from room to room. Even if you fall asleep – and most guests do – you'll be left to slumber in peace.

"You can not be quick here, it is about relaxing," says spa supervisor Huynh Thi Cam Huong. "I think a lot of customers actually come to sleep," she laughs.

A session of yoga or Tai Chi in the roof top fitness room is the perfect way to start the day (US\$11), followed by one of the spa's numerous facial and body therapies. Facials are the signature treatment here and cost between US\$37 and US\$77. Each is personalised to your particular skin type and uses the spa's own product range, made with a dizzying array of ingredients such as lemon, thyme, rosemary, geranium, honey, aloe vera and periwinkle.

There are six massages to choose from, but rightly recommended is the hot stone treatment, which feels as if molten liquid is being oozed over your skin and is melting the muscles inside (US\$77 for 90 minutes).

■ THE INDIAN TOUCH

If that sounds good, then the ancient Indian head oil treatment called Shirodhara is even better. Only available at **Xuan Spa in the Park Hyatt** this treatment is the epitome of complete relaxation – where not even the touch of a human hand is there to remind you of the outside world. The treatment (US\$55 for 45 minutes) involves a continuous stream of warm sesame seed oil being poured over the third eye, the forehead and the hair line, creating the sensation of thick waves lapping over and down your head. It is utterly beautiful.

Shirodhara is one of four Ayurvedic thera-

The staff really looks after you here. The towels are arranged during the massage in such a way to make you never feel exposed

pies unique to the spa.

"We introduced the Indian treatments in January and they are very popular especially with our Japanese customers," says assistant spa manager Anh Huong. "Our manager, who is Indian, taught us all the techniques, the materials and showed us how to warm the oil. So we do it exactly the same as it is done in India."

Indian body treatments in a spa that looks like a Royal Egyptian bath is about as decadent as you can get. Fresh cotton robes, straw sandals and cotton underwear are laid out for you in the cream and gold changing areas, which house a jacuzzi and steam room where you can lounge at leisure, reading the latest magazines. Down a pristine cream corridor lie the seven treatment rooms that are all completely private and very, very quiet.

Treatments start with your feet and lower legs being submerged in a bowl of scented water, gently washed and dried by one therapist, while another massages your head, neck and upper arms. They end with a pot of lemongrass or ginger tea served with slices of apple, while you recline, Cleopatra-like, on the massage bed.

■ MORE THAN JUST ZEN

Less indulgent and much more Zen is **Spa Tropic**. Tucked away down a typical Saigon alley, once you've picked

your way through the motorbikes and the men lounging around drinking coffee, you'll find a tranquil space completely shut off from city life. The high-beamed-ceiling of the reception room, minimalist white décor, simple flower arrangements, sliding screen doors and pocket-sized Japanese garden give this spa an ethereal, airy feel.

However, spa director Thuy M. Do says the Zen atmosphere people rave about was really a bit of "an accident" – her only specification when she built the spa in 2002 was to create somewhere with a sense of privacy and space.

"In Vietnam there is no sense of privacy," she says, "and that's something I wanted to create, not just calm, but space – that's hard to find in this city."

The result is that people here have their own treatment room, where they change and shower, rather than being in a room with five other people lying next to them.

Spa Tropic is popular for its massages which include a deep tissue massage (US\$25 for 60 minutes) that uses Swedish techniques, an aromatherapy massage (US\$45 for 75 minutes), a warm stone massage (US\$45 for 90 minutes) and a herbal heat energizer



Essential oils: Refining the experience