

The Spa of Spas is in Vietnam

BY CAROL BENET

For me, one of the pleasures of traveling the world is finding unique spas. I recently visited Vietnam, which has become a hot destination for tourists.

Thanks to Kim Lien Peck, a native of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) who just moved from Tiburon to Portland, Oregon, I learned about L'apothiquaire.

Vietnam is a country that specializes in massage for tourists. In fact, if you want a massage, a reflexology treatment or a beauty treatment anywhere in Vietnam, there are dozens of possibilities right in your hotel and on the busy streets.

For the tourist, getting a massage is as common as enjoying a bowl of pho, Vietnam's treasured noodle soup. You can have either at any time, day or night. And they are cheap — about \$1 for the pho, and as little as \$5 for a full hour massage in some places. Of course, hotels are more expensive (\$30 at one of the most luxurious hotels, Romana Resort, just north of Mui Ne Beach).

As for L'apothiquaire the price tag was \$100 for a five-hour session that included being picked up in a limousine at the hotel; an hour deep-tissue massage; an hour body exfoliation using sea salts, oils and milks; an hour-long facial that also included massage of the neck and face and so many products on and off my face that I lost count; and an hour devoted to a foot reflexology/lower leg massage.



L'apothiquaire spa in Ho Chi Minh City.

Included in the price was a three-course light spa lunch ending with a brownie and chocolate covered strawberries. There is also a small swimming pool in the garden if you wanted to make an entire day of it.

There are several other treatment choices: hot stone, mud body wrap, paraffin for hands or feet, manicures/pedicures, hair styling, Jacuzzi soaks, after-sports treatments, de-stress body care, eye care, skin whitening, and anti-aging and skin purification treatments. There are also treatments for men.

Then, there are the products — all imported from France and quite a bargain by our standards.

And as far as the quality of massage, it was one of the best I've ever had — firm, professional and soothing. You can tell them what ails you and how hard a massage you want and they will actually do what you want — for hours.

Plan a day at L'apothiquaire. There are two in Ho Chi Minh City (ask for the original, old mansion location). There is another in the resort town Dolat in the SoEitel Hotel.

Maybe pleasures like those offered at L'apothiquaire are why Vietnam is on everyone's travel list. Vietnam is also, for the moment, a shopaholic's paradise. Go before it gets more expensive. You can book in



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