

Xuan Spa: Luxury defined



An orange glow: Located in Eden Mall, Glow Spa provides a great downtown retreat



Calming the body

It's hot and sticky. You've been caught in one too many thunderstorms to last a lifetime and work is making you wonder why you even bother getting up in the mornings. Time to relax, unwind and even better, chill. We take you on a tour of six of the city's spas where you can recharge your body, mind and spirit. Words by Jo Hartley. Photos by Peter Stuckings.

FOR PLACES TO UNWIND RIGHT IN THE heart of the city, the Saigon spa scene does not disappoint. From luxurious French colonial villas to funky downtown retreats, Ho Chi Minh City has it all.

A good place to start for a touch of old world Vietnam is **Chy Spa**. A cosy, hideaway down by the river in District 1, its dark wood and rattan interior give this place a traditional Asian feel. Staff talk in hushed whispers as they usher you up the narrow-winding stairs to the treatment rooms, making you feel as if you are about to take part in something special, something secret.

The wooden massage beds are draped with soft white towels and decorated with single pink orchids. Low lighting and soft music complete the mood as you give yourself up to the wonders of the Chy Signature Massage (US\$15 for 60 minutes, US\$22 for 90 minutes).

"It is a combination of massage techniques the trainers designed just for us," says spa owner Huynh Hai Yen. "It uses shiatsu pressure points on the back combined with aromatherapy massage, which uses sweeping movements to create a softer massage."

The resulting treatment is almost hypnotic. The sweeping strokes are executed with equal pressure up and down the body and interspersed with strong pushes on the pressure points of the spine, the wrists, feet, neck and head. This leaves you completely relaxed and at the mercy of your therapist.

As well as treatments the spa also has a steam room and sauna where you can sweat away the stresses of the day. But its unique selling point is a huge courtyard jacuzzi set under its own pagoda, surrounded by lush plants and trailing flowers. It can be used any time of the day but is most special at night when you can enjoy an evening soak with a loved one under the stars (part of the Chy Spa Package at US\$98 for four to five hours).

■ FRENCH DECADENCE

Not so far across town but a world away in looks is **La Maison de L'Apothiquaire**, a three-storey French colonial villa with its own swimming pool. Set in lush grounds down a leafy lane in District 3, the villa, built in 1950 by the same architect who built the Reunification Palace, has been restored to

perfection. Pale gray shutters flank floor to ceiling windows that open up on to balconies bursting with pink bougainvillea, while inside, white tiled floors, chandeliers, purple velvet curtains and fuchsia cushions give an elegant French feel.

Everything about L'Apothiquaire has been designed to make you feel as if you are a million miles away from Saigon – it is as if you have stepped back in time to a France where local herbalists mix up health and beauty remedies.

"The concept is traditional French and herbal medicines for the skin," says owner Emily Lan. "Everything is 100% organic and natural."

"Our aim was to create a place for total wellness," she says. "In any society stress is a part of life nowadays, and we wanted to offer people some relaxation



Time to wind down: Spas aren't a place for clock-watching