

## Introduction to Spa Therapy

The traditional definition of a spa is:

**'A place of natural occurring thermal or mineral waters'**

For centuries people have travelled to certain towns or places that were renowned for the curative effects of the local water. They would either drink the water or immerse themselves in it believing that it had special healing powers. Certain forms of ritual purification were carried out by native Americans, Persians and Babylonians. The Latin words '**Sanus Per Aquam**' mean **health through water**. There are also those who associate the term "Spa" with the name of a town in Belgium that drew people from many areas to its healing waters during the 16th century.

Water therapy has in fact been in existence for thousands of years and there is documented evidence that the Indians, Egyptians, Assyrians and Mohammedans used mineral waters for curative purposes. Many people including the Japanese, Chinese, Greeks and in particular the Romans used warm baths for therapeutic purpose, relaxation, reducing fatigue, promoting wound healing and increasing a sense of well being. The Roman bath was an important centre for social and recreational activities and they established many baths in Europe, taking advantage of areas with naturally occurring hot springs such as, Aix-en-Provence and Vichy in France and Bath and Buxton in England. In Greek mythology it was thought that certain natural springs were blessed by the gods to provide a cure for disease.

Today however, many people look upon a Spa as a concept combining, leisure, health, beauty and relaxation. Because of this the word spa is often used inappropriately to describe many establishments in the health, leisure and relaxation industry, these may include the hotel with a swimming pool or a small salon with a jacuzzi. Whilst they may provide excellent treatment and service they are not a true spa which uses natural resources and provides longer lasting health benefits.

Our clients are becoming far more health conscious and aware of the many therapeutic treatments available to counteract the stress of modern day living. The industry is responding to their needs by introducing more spa destinations and treatments. Water is the basis of spa treatment and in addition to the water therapies available salons and spas are introducing beneficial treatments using derivatives from the sea and other sources of thermal or mineral waters in addition to the popular heat treatments using sauna and steam baths.

There are different classifications of a Spa and they include:

**Urban spa** - may also be called a **Day spa** and is usually situated in a city centre, health club, shopping centre, airport, hotel or department store, providing day treatments only, accommodation is not provided and it is a blissful escape from the stresses and strain of city life. One of the least expensive ways to enjoy a spa experience. Spa day packages are usually designed to last between two and three hours and usually include a light lunch or other healthy refreshment.

**Destination Spa** - a short stay residential spa designed to improve health and often situated at the site of hot springs and mineral waters or in exotic locations around the world. In addition to spa and beauty treatments there are also physical activities, healthy cuisine and the opportunity for education in

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spa & beauty therapy in practice

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all areas of health and well being. All inclusive programmes are popular in these spas with some treatments included and a range of optional treatments available. This type of spa is ideal for the single spa goer as they have organised activities and classes which allows social interaction with other like minded spa enthusiasts.

**Medi Spa** - a medical spa that provides all the usual spa treatments and in addition focuses on specialised treatments that may only be administered by a medical practitioner. These treatments may include; medical peels, Botox, dermal fillers, laser and medical microdermabrasion. The ambience is normally more clinical than other spas as the main objectives are wellness, preventative healthcare and providing cosmetic and aesthetic procedures. Other treatments that may be offered are those that have a beneficial effect on the mind as well as the body, such as hypnotherapy, psychotherapy, fitness training and nutritional advice.

**Hotel/Resort Spa** - the hotel with a spa is gaining in popularity as the discerning traveller has come to expect far more than room and board. The hotel spa varies greatly in size from small country house hotels to the larger hotels that may be part of a hotel group and have built separate spa facilities to accommodate swimming pools, wet rooms and gyms as well as treatment rooms for all the spa therapies. This type of spa is usually open to day visitors also.

**Cruise ship Spa** - a spa at sea aboard a luxury cruise liner, offering the same facilities and pampering beauty treatments as other spas, including; spa float, seaweed and mud wraps, thalassotherapy, thermal treatments and hydrotherapy. The modern cruise enthusiast enjoys the relaxing spa therapies as an antidote to the fast pace of sightseeing and the over indulgence in the array of cuisines that are available aboard ship. Many cruise ship spas are operated by leading product companies such as Elemis providing all their signature treatments and some also offer image altering treatments such as; tooth whitening, botox and restylane and health therapies such as chiropractic care and acupuncture.

**Thermal or Mineral Spa** - these spas are developed around naturally occurring mineral waters and often in mountainous locations. They are popular for 'Taking' the water to improve health as well as providing many beneficial spa treatments.

**Eco Spa** - A spa that offers organic treatments and is environmentally friendly in the way in which it is built, the materials used to build the spa and by being energy efficient in the day to day running of the spa.

**Ayurveda Spa** - specialising in ayurvedic treatments, following the principles of the oldest known health system in the world, used to prevent and heal diseases and their symptoms, delay the ageing process and enhance the immune system. Treatments are individually tailored to the client's needs after a thorough consultation with the physician. Yoga and meditation are also an important part of the treatment programme.

**Thalassotherapy Spa** - this type of spa uses warm sea water for its curative effects in treatment, it is also ideal for detoxification, relaxation, de-stressing, soothing aches and pains and as a treatment for insomnia. Exposure to sea water and its derivatives helps to restore the body's natural chemical balance.