

Wednesday, 7 October 2020

All under an hour

If a spa session pre-Covid-19 equates to an eight-hour sleep, the relaxation quotient for a similar session these days is just a 20-minute nap, writes **Syida Lizta Amirul Ihsan**

A SPA session is famously long. It takes three to four hours, depending on what you choose. It usually starts with a warm cup of tea to relax the mind and body, followed by a body scrub, shower and massage.

Add on other treatments like body wrap, facial or foot bath and we're looking at a longer time spent at the spa.

But since July 1, when the government allowed all spas, wellness and reflexology centres to resume operations, new practices imposed as part of the Recovery Movement Control Order have changed how these businesses operate.

On top of the compulsory hand sanitising, wearing of face masks and shields (for the therapists) and using disposable bed sheets, all treatments should take no more than an hour.

A RELAXING TIME

I book a session at the post-Covid-19 Spa at Mandarin Oriental, an establishment famous for its relaxing treatments to see how things have changed for the business.

One of the high points of the spa is its location that's cool and quiet, away from the hustle and bustle of the hotel, located right smack in the city.

My therapist is Izza. Before I start, I change into a bath robe in the locker room and walk back to the spa. The spa management implements this procedure (instead of customers changing in the treatment room) as a preventive measure to make sure customers do not bring in viruses that may stick onto their clothing or bag.

As someone who wears the tudung, I find it uncomfortable to walk in public in my robe and tudung. True, the robe covers me, but a bath robe isn't what one typically wears in public.



The bed is lined with a disposable bed sheet, on top of the washable one, before treatment.

But things get better once I get into the treatment room. I opt for the Immune Booster treatment, conceptualised especially for the current pandemic situation.

It promises a rebalancing massage using a potent anti-bacterial blend of eucalyptus, tea tree, pine and lavender essential oils.

Focusing particularly on areas of the body that are put under stress when faced with viral conditions, the treatment is said to support and strengthen physical and emotional wellbeing.

OIL BLEND

I inhale the massage oil before Izza starts the treatment. I have not had any massage since the MCO started — not even with my regular massage lady who would

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come over for an urut session — so this is a much-needed respite for me.

She helps with my tight muscles (no thanks to sitting on the floor while working during the MCO because I did not, at that point, have a proper work desk at home).

I like it that she focuses on the upper back and shoulders because these are the parts that need help the most.

The warmth of the therapist's hands is now replaced with the rubbery feel of disposable gloves, but given that physical contact is discouraged, this is as good as it gets.

Working conditions during the MCO and its subsequent iterations have become both flexible and erratic and there's definitely more screen time and, subsequently, tired shoulders.

While I cannot vouch for the anti-bacterial properties of the oil blend, I find it very relaxing and refreshing.

Sometimes, when Izza moves, I can hear the sound of plastic from her disposable apron while I close my eyes. It's quite funny because the whole idea of a spa is to diminish all sounds except for the soothing music — that's why therapists almost always don't talk during treatment.

ENDS TOO SOON

I am about to fall asleep halfway through the treatment when I realise that this isn't a normal 90-minute massage.

I ask Izza how long is left and she says 20 minutes. Those minutes feel like a breeze and before I know it, she sounds the gong (a smaller version of what one would find at a sound bath session) to signal that time is up.

She leaves the room and I change into my robe to walk back to the locker room, all the while thinking that this is not nearly relaxing enough. But then again, an hour's massage is better than nothing.

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The therapist is equipped with a face mask and shield throughout the treatment.



Foot bath, once a spa staple, is not on the menu now.

(Source: NST, Flair, 7 October 2020, Wednesday)