



The Time Out guide to...

Spa trekking

Change your body parts in foreign parts. **Jessica Baldwin** went from Soho to the Sahara in search of new skin and more...

I'm in Soho's Aqua Sheko fish spa, confused and topless, awkwardly clinging to the massage chair for modesty, while unwittingly staring at a Romanian masseuse's crotch – and I only came for a pedicure. The beauty world is unpredictable, and grows more obscure by the day. Thankfully the bull sperm hair mask seems to have gone out of fashion in London. However, in Japan, geishas are frantically rubbing nightingale droppings on their faces; in Russia men slathered in olive oil rejoice in whipping each other with branches. The Israelis like snake massages while the French, obviously, love to bathe in wine. Beauty tourism is gaining momentum with Brits travelling the world for the latest wonder treatments. My own journey began during my New Year detox...

Start from the bottom...

I decided to cleanse my bowels in preparation for summer – and I opted to do it in London, because I didn't fancy having my arse messed about with abroad. When the therapist asked me to stick out my tongue, I thought I'd booked the wrong treatment. A quick analysis revealed a malfunctioning liver, misbalanced energy, high stress levels and a diet in need of refining. The diagnosis: 'Enough: trousers off, on the bed... back facing me.' In that position, you can control nothing. As I left the clinic (carefully), I felt lighter and cleansed and vowed to improve my health, inside and out...
Hydrohealing, 216a Kensington Park Rd, W11 1NR (7727 2570/ www.hydrohealing.com). Colonic hydrotherapy £85.

Feet

Londoners are going crazy for fish pedicures. Aqua Sheko in Soho offers a range of treatments using illuminated boxes filled with ravenous garra rufa fish. As my therapist looked for a hungry shoal, I noticed hundreds of fish attacking what looked like a decapitated toe, only to discover it was a stray peanut. Plunging in my feet, I squealed as 200 slimy tiddlers went to work. But the intense tickling soon became strangely enjoyable and relaxing, although without any obvious benefit to my feet. Rumour has it a full-body tank with foot-long fish is on its way. Aqua Sheko, 29-30 Frith St, W1D 5LG (7734 8977/ www.aquasheko.co.uk). Deluxe manicure and pedicure £45, including massage.

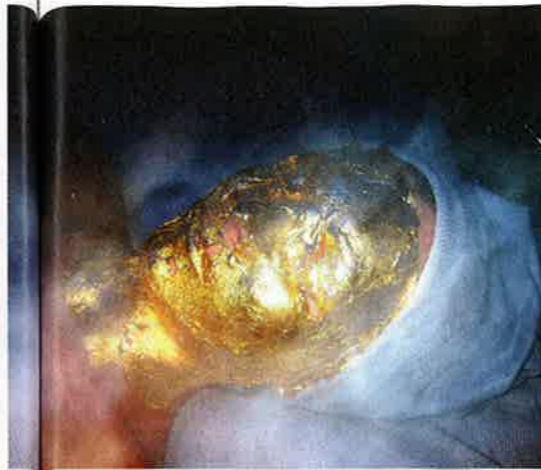
Knees

High in the Valais region of the Swiss Alps is the picturesque village of St Luc, all chalet-fringed streets and views of snow-capped mountains at every turn. One of the best is from the Hotel Bella-Tola's terrace. I was here to seek out the medicinal Moiry glacial mud, rumoured to soothe skin and ease aching limbs. After a morning collecting the silken mud

with the hotel owner, I went to the spa for the signature treatment: the 'Anniversaries Alpine Ritual'. It began in a pine-infused Turkish bath, where I was first scrubbed with dried yarrow flowers, used for centuries for their healing and antiseptic properties. Then came the luxurious glacial mud, mixed with local flower oils and rose water, applied head to toe, after which I was wrapped in a cocoon of plastic to aid absorption. Finally I was given a divine sesame oil massage using sachets of heated petals including dog rose, wild pansy and geranium. The treatment certainly left me with silky-soft skin, and the village itself was the ultimate in stress-busting scenic beauty. Bella Tola, 3961 St-Luc, Switzerland (www.bellatola.ch). From approx £210 per night, full-board, based on two sharing. Two-hour Anniversaries Alpine Ritual approx £165.

Stomach and blood

My next stop was Spain's SHA Wellness Clinic. My transfer soon left behind the burger joints, Irish pubs and stag groups of Benidorm, and before long I was in the much calmer setting of the clinic: a perfect place to have my blood extracted.



Tour of beauty Clockwise from far left: Collecting medicinal mud at the Moiry Glacier, Switzerland; Feeling a million dollars while getting gold plated in Tuscany; Trying to keep a straight face during a Moroccan massage with a difference; Ravenous fish devour dead skin in Soho; The swimming pool at the SHA Wellness Clinic, Alicante

SHA's mesotherapy involved taking six vials of my blood, centrifuging them to separate the plasma, then adding oxygen and vitamins before injecting them back into my face in a bid to prevent ageing. Just a day after my surprisingly painless experience my skin seemed plumper and smoother, but part of my radiance may have been down to the clinic's macrobiotic diet. I'd feared bland, flavourless food but got a beautifully presented scallop gazpacho chased by a theatrical trail of dry ice, foie of monkfish liver with umeboshi, and an indulgent dessert of 'chocolate textures'. Later, though, I was put on a real diet: denied bread and my daily glass of red, a situation which no amount of negotiation could alter. 'Do you serve grape juice, then?' I asked. 'Yes,' replied the waiter. 'Great, I'll have a large glass of fermented red grape juice.' He smiled and returned with water. If you want a serious detox in the lap of luxury there is no better place to go. Although as I arrived, Simon Cowell was leaving by helicopter. SHA Wellness Clinic, Verderol 5, El Albir, Alicante, Spain (www.shawellnessclinic.com). From approx £350 per night, full-board, based on two sharing. Mesotherapy from £230.

Back

After a weekend of indulgence in Jimi Hendrix's hippy Moroccan heartland, Essaouria, I relocated to the Es Saadi

Palace in Marrakech: an opulent oasis of a resort in the parched south and a pocket of calm only steps away from the manic medina. Immaculate gardens surrounded a glistening shimmering pool and a seriously impressive spa, recently made the only Dior Institut outside Paris. I was there to experience a four-hand massage with a difference. I lay in my paper pants, the lights dimmed and two women set me at ease with a gently relaxing massage. As I drifted off I felt an odd sensation as they began massaging me with coconut shells. Then came heat, and I turned my head to see the women rolling enormous hot water balloons along my body. I giggled, burying my head in the table as the jiggling balloons made their way up to my ears. Minutes later the women began pulling me into strange tantric positions, body bits flew everywhere and they pulled my feet up to my ears and forcefully pinned me to the table. I was just about managing to keep a straight face as they attempted to lift my entire body off the table, leaving my arms and legs flailing in the air, at which point they both burst into fits of laughter. When the therapists can't keep a straight face you know you've gone too far. Es Saadi Gardens and Resort, Rue Ibrahim El Mazini, Hivernage, Marrakesh, Morocco (www.essaadi.com). From approx £200 per person, per night on a bed and breakfast basis. 'Blissful Signature Ritual' approx £230.



Rest of the body

Go back to the womb Or, more accurately, the Corallium Spa's Womb Room in the **Lopesan Costa Meloneras Resort**, Gran Canaria. Enter via the 'neck of the uterus' passage then kick back on the blood-coloured waterbeds and enjoy the bodily sound effects. www.lopesan.com

Designer vagina Getting a brazilian in Rio or heading to the US for a Hollywood is so last year: for the ultimate in preened privates head to **Wicked Waxing** in Chelmsford for a vajazzle. www.wickedwaxing.com

Scrub up When in Istanbul, visit the genteel, gendered baths at traditional **Cagaloglu Hamami** to get shiny new skin. www.cagalogluhamami.com.tr

Million dollar barnet Head to **Harl's** on London's King's Road for a hair mask with a difference. The Iranian caviar hair mask promises to add shine and vitality to lacklustre locks. www.harlssalon.com

Make hay in Italy The residents of South Tyrol have been bathing in steaming hay baths since the nineteenth century. At **Terme Merano** they claim a 20-minute session will ease aches and pains. www.termemerano.com

Face

The luxurious Terme di Saturnia Spa & Gold Resort, which is just under two hours from Rome, greets visitors with the stench of rotting eggs. 'The swimming pool is alive,' explained the staff. Once I was in the pool, the smell became less noticeable and the 37C water was deeply soothing. 'Don't stay in longer than 20 minutes,' warned my therapist. 'It's potent.' After half an hour I felt stoned. The hotel also owns the public pool next door, which on Friday and Saturday nights in summer stays open until 1am with live music. The candlelit pool is clearly where local lovers come to seal the deal, floating around in awe of each other. Alone, I decided to spoil myself with a 24-carat gold facial. After a gentle massage and face mask, uncountable sheets of gold leaf were layered over my face one by one. Apart from a brief moment of panic when they simultaneously covered my eyes, nose and mouth, the experience was blissful. Afterwards, I held back the urge to scream in disbelief as the therapist rinsed all the gold down the sink. Terme di Saturnia Spa & Golf Resort, Saturnia (Grosseto), Tuscany, Italy (www.termedi-saturnia.it). From approx £185 per person, per night on bed and breakfast basis. Gold Facial from approx £265.