

From the majestic Roman baths I saw in picture books as a child to the idea of a bathing ritual steeped in social interaction and healing, there is something intriguing about hot springs. After visiting Bath in the UK, I was even more drawn in by everything from the Sacred Springs to the bubbling water that's raised to the surface of the baths due to geothermal energy. The process was fascinating, the curved pillars and imposing statues even more so. Learning about the middle-eastern variant (more in our box below) was equally captivating.

Mosaic tiles, steam rising up from deep square marble blocks, splashes of colour sending you into what seems like a psychedelic wave as your vision blurs and strong hands knead tension out of your neck and shoulders — the Turkish hammam is not for the faint-hearted, especially in the most traditional format (with a more public steam than most of us would like!). This is why L'Occitane makes for a good place to get an introduction to the therapy. The spa here is less 'exotic' and more 'modern luxury', which, after a long day, is a better option. Though thankfully more private, the ritual is steeped in historical tradition. If you're a bit jumpy about the idea, remember it's no different from a full body scrub, so don't let the word 'bath' throw you into a nervous tizzy.

STEP IT UP

No matter how many luxurious spas you've already visited, this sprawling space is a well-



TIPS & TRICKS

While the intense nature of the traditional Hammam can be terrifying for those not accustomed to being scrubbed and splashed with water, if you close your eyes and think of Holi, you'll do fine. If you're not as lucky as I was with prior knowledge and a great therapist, you could be in for some rude shocks. Here's how to avoid them:

- The steam can be strong. Let them know if this is something that makes you feel uncomfortable, since several people find it hard to breathe in a high-temperature sauna room.
- Don't be shy about making your preferences known before you go into the bath section, including if your skin is too sensitive to be scrubbed excessively or if you're allergic to (or simply don't like) certain scents or soaps.
- Therapists are usually trained to relieve you of any pressure left over from your massage (more so if you haven't had one before the treatment). If this is your first time, don't nod along to 'intense' or 'hard' pressure queries. Pick soft or medium strokes instead.
- Water can get too hot or too cold. Let them know if they don't ask.
- Keep your head high up on the table to avoid any contact lens issues.

>> Right from the lobby, you're enveloped by luxury at Spa la Vie By L'Occitane

complete with soothing lavender oil to breathe in before the treatment.

DIFFERENT STROKES

I picked a Relaxing Aromachologie Massage, an interesting mix in one, super stress-releasing session. Aromachologie is based on how scents (oils) can influence mood and behaviour, and the lavender, tea tree and geranium oil used during my treatment was heavenly. The massage involves Swedish strokes, Chinese acupressure and Balinese techniques, so it's perfect for those who (like me) can't choose one over the other.

After my hour was up, it was time for a sauna, and then the hammam. I was slightly skeptical — I'm not fond of being bathed and a little wary of excessive scrubbing. But, as strange as it feels to lie flat on a slab of heated marble, once the multiple shower heads begin to hit your skin with contrasting pressure and temperature, it's easy to disregard all trepidation. If you walk in with aches and pains, you're going to be thrilled to find yourself walking out almost magically healed. I wouldn't say it left me refreshed and raring to go; I was ready for bed at 9pm! The scrubbing, though it doesn't seem like it will during the ritual, will leave your skin soft and smooth for weeks (two weeks for me), and while the 20-minute cap seems like it's going to be long and boring, it whizzes by.

After the ritual, spend a few extra minutes sipping on the green tea they offer, soaking in the silence, before dragging yourself back out to meet the jarring sounds of the city.

Price Relaxing Aromachologie Massage + Hammam Essential for ₹5,463, all inclusive
Where Apollo Mills Compound, near Lodha Bellissimo, NM Joshi Marg, Lower Parel (e)
Contact 23059055

THE HAMMAM IN HISTORY

Even if I had gone into the experience with only the Roman baths on my mind, I wouldn't have been so far off base. With roots in ancient Greek rituals that were spread across cultures, these were most popular in Europe and the Mediterranean, but they did make their way to India in the 16th century, with several Turkish Baths brought in by the Mughals (you can still



visit some today). They were traditionally more of a social ritual and focused on several elements including water, beauty, health and balance. The main difference would be that it was more of a bath than a sauna, and there were hot rooms of varying degrees as well as a cooling room for relaxation afterwards — an experience you would get if you travelled to places of its origin to dive into the experience. They have been used as a form of therapy, for purification and also simply as a form of relaxation and recovery.

WHAT A TREAT-MENT!

Much has been said about the secrets of the east, but perhaps one of the most exotic is the Turkish Hammam.

Rhea Dhanbhora tests the waters during an updated massage and hammam combination at Spa la Vie By L'Occitane

designed one that's impossible to remain unimpressed by. From the greenery covered wall outside to the sleek reception area that is as large as some entire spas, there's middle-eastern artefacts, swanky seating and a wall of products to lust over. You know you're in for a treat when you step into one of the massage rooms, which resemble five-star hotel suites. From the bathtub-for-one and comfortable chair alongside to a separate wardrobe area (complete with its own light), spending just 60 minutes here almost seems wasteful.

GIVE ME MORE

It's safe to say that the massage table itself is one of the comfiest in the city. This is important, because it keeps neck cricks and cramps at bay, both of which are often the unfortunate result of having your head pressed down into a lumpy pillow or hanging into an ill-designed face rest.

The right ambiance changes everything and while my spa visits across the city have missed appropriate music or good lighting, this had the right combination of everything,



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Price ₹31,500 onwards
Where Tranceforme, F-11, 1st floor, Laxmi Mills Estate, Off Dr. E Moses Road, Mahalaxmi

