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Ancient Wisdom

Ayurveda is one of the oldest healing sciences in the world, originating in India over 5,000 years ago. It is perhaps the subcontinent's most significant export in terms of the long-term health benefits that it delivers and life-long knowledge that it imparts

In contrast to Western medicine, Ayurveda does not focus on disease. Rather, it is based on a philosophy that concentrates on the elemental energies that make up our physical constitution. Accordingly, when these energies are in balance, the body's natural defence systems will be strong and can more easily safeguard against illness.

The term Ayurveda is made up of two Sanskrit words: *ayu*, meaning life, and *veda*, meaning knowledge or science. Ayurveda, then, is a science of life that teaches individuals that they can control their health by understanding and addressing their unique body type.

Ayurveda's diagnoses and healing methods are based on imbalances of the *doshas*, the body's three vital energies. *Vata* governs the energy of movement; *pitta*, digestion and metabolism; *kapha*, moisture and lubrication. Typically, an eight-step examination is conducted to determine the balance of the doshas. This involves assessing the patient's pulse, tongue, voice, skin, vision, and general appearance. After a diagnosis has been made, a course of treatments and a special diet will be prescribed.

At the dedicated **Ayurvedic Hut** at Pangkor Laut Spa Village in Malaysia (Pangkor Laut Island, Lumut, Perak, Malaysia; 60-5/699-1100; www.pangkorlautresort.com), consultants are on hand to determine a guest's dosha and any imbalances that may exist. A variety of individual treatments or health programs are then recommended. All programs are designed as a continuous course ranging in length from one week to a month, though for optimum results, a patient must continue to abide by the lifestyle guidelines that his or her therapist sets out. But for those looking for a less-regimented introduction to this ancient

medical science, a number of spas around the region offer exotic, one-off treatments.

ABHYANGA Abhyanga is a simple application of warm herbal oil, rubbed gently over the entire body. Designed to expel toxins, alleviate fatigue, delay ageing, improve blood circulation, enhance the immune system, and rejuvenate the body, this treatment is performed with a combination of

massage strokes, using oils specifically suited to a guest's constitution. The massage is then followed by a steam bath, to ensure that the body absorbs as much of the oil as possible. Abhyanga is an enjoyable experience in its own right, but is more often given as a prelude to other, more specific treatments.



The Shirodhara treatment promotes deep mental relaxation.

SHIRODHARA This unique and oft-photographed practice involves applying a stream of warm herbal oil to the forehead. According to Ayurvedic science, this is where the "third eye" resides, and treating it in this way promotes deep mental relaxation. Shirodhara aims to calm

the central nervous system and restore equilibrium of all doshas. It is also considered effective for those suffering from chronic headaches, ear and nose complaints, neuropathy, and spinal problems. During this blissful treatment, the therapist focuses on massaging the chest upwards in order to release toxins; a gentle scalp massage ends the session.

UDWARTHANAM Ayurveda can also help you lose weight. The Udwarthanam treatment, usually prescribed to complement an Ayurvedic diet, helps to tone muscles while reducing fat and water retention in the body. The technique consists of a gentle application of prescribed oil followed by a rubdown with a special herbal paste.

sea views, it's also available at the **Hotel Padma Bali** (Jl. Padma No. 1, Legian; 62-361/752-140).

MASSAGE Traditional Indonesian massage, or *pijat*, celebrates the healing power of touch. It has not developed out of a science of anatomy, rather than from the intuitive knowledge of which parts of the body need special attention and what manner of manipulation is best suited to ease particular aches and pains. The whole body benefits from this treatment due to its combination of long, deep strokes, shorter rolling movements, and acupressure. The feet and hands for example, react particularly well to concentrated pressure at certain points, whereas the large muscle groups in the legs and back are best suited to long, languid strokes that soothe and elongate tense or pulled muscles. An Indonesian massage always begins at the feet in order to awaken the body's senses and ends at the head. After this thorough rubdown, you will be



Herbs and spices used in traditional Indonesian treatments.

left feeling very light and relaxed. The newly minted **Namaya Spa** at the Sofitel Seminyak Bali (Jl. Abimanyu, Seminyak Beach; 62-361/730-730) provides a very good Balinese massage with their own blends of essential oils. Or make the most of the island's lush forests and pictur-

PRANA SPA AT THE VILLAS BALI HOTEL & SPA

As the island's first Mogul-inspired spa, Prana is richly decorated with hand-picked furnishings including sumptuous carpets, mosaics, carved wooden doors, and Indian silk paintings. As guests enter, they are surrounded by soothing sounds and scents while being energized by vibrant designs and colors. Highly skilled therapists will guide guests through Prana Spa's extensive menu, which includes Ayurvedic, Indonesian jamu, and conventional beauty treatments. Guests can create their own spa programs tailored to their needs. This spacious 1,300-square-meter spa provides comprehensive facilities including 24 massage rooms, plunge pools, saunas, steam rooms, and a dedicated reflexology area. After treatments, guests can relax in the lush, palm-filled central courtyard or dine at the restaurant, which serves organic Ayurveda and Indian food. *Jalan Kunti 118X, Seminyak, Bali; 62-361/730-840; www.thevillas.net*

