

TEA TOO

The healing, regenerative, contemplative powers of tea can be a perfect fit for some spa and retreat experiences.

Words / Judy Chapman

Photography: Getty Images

Who would have thought the exquisite tea leaf could bring so much beauty? Revered for its rejuvenating and antioxidant properties, it's little wonder the renaissance of tea has infiltrated the world of spas and retreats. Think treatments made with freshly picked green tea and spas located in historic tea plantations.

There's often grace in the simple things — the normal activities of those who reside in rural Japan, for example: a hot spring bath, a sip of sake and the tea ceremony. Like the words that float from a Japanese haiku, it's the subtle moments that endure.

TEA TIME OUT

Drinking tea already honours the qualities of spa. From the English high tea to the green tea ceremony, the essence is about rest and time spent with others. Tea rituals also honour individualism. Indeed, no two cups are ever the same and the best spa and retreat experiences are tailor made. More and more, we desire handmade creations dreamt up by people who think for themselves with stories to share. Think of freshly harvested plants that are handpicked, hand-blended and bottled like sweet little offerings.

BEAUTIFUL TEA

Tea has long been used for beautifying. In ancient India, women combined strong Indian tea with cloves to darken greying hair. In Jamaica, rum is added to tea to bring out highlights. Gypsy women are believed to have drunk nettle tea to keep their hair dark and glossy. Chamomile tea will add highlights to hair. Ginseng tea is reportedly good to add a glow to dark or grey hair.

In China, experience a hot herbal compress made from ginger root and red tea dipped in warm sesame oil to relieve muscle aches and pains. Over in Thailand, try a hydrating facial made with green tea and bamboo shoot extract to help heal dull and congested complexions. Other alluring experiences include a Ceylon tea bath, a green tea and rose petal bath, and a white and hibiscus tea hydration mist. There are also body scrubs and foot baths, all containing white, green or black tea.

TEA FOR YOU

Next to water, tea is the world's most consumed beverage. With a tea history spanning more than 5000 years, India and China top the world as consumers of it. The popular story of how tea was discovered dates back to China around 3000 BC when a tea leaf accidentally fell into Emperor Shen Nung's boiled water. Since it's beginnings in the East, tea has travelled far and wide.

Green tea is the variety that is centre stage at tea parties around the world. Most of us know that drinking green



tea regularly is reported to enhance our immune system, increase our metabolic rate, help prevent cancer, reduce heart disease and stroke risk and relieve arthritis as well as hydrate and rejuvenate the body. According to new research, treatments made with tea are also believed to be overflowing with health benefits.

Of course, if you are going on retreat for a cleanse, you may not want the caffeine that comes from tea but new research has proven that tea works as an antioxidant when applied topically to the skin. The compounds in green tea, polyphenols, are high in antioxidants and recent findings demonstrate that when these are applied topically to the skin, they may help protect the skin from ultraviolet (UV) radiation-induced damage. Research conducted at the Skin Study Center at the University Hospitals of Cleveland and Case Western Reserve University in the US have found that topically applied green tea decreases the direct effects of sunburn.

There have been other findings as well. Some say tea applied topically can help prevent damage from environmental pollutants. Green tea also has anti-ageing benefits. Some believe that applying antioxidant-rich green tea protects the skin against free-radical damage.

Tea also knows no boundaries. Today, there are lovely colonial-style spas being built in tea plantations in Sri Lanka, India and Malaysia. Just imagine resting on a verandah overlooking a tea plantation, the source of the ingredients for the heavenly spa treatments you are about to take.

Judy Chapman is the former editor-in-chief of Spa Asia magazine and author of four bestselling books on spas. Over the past 20 years, Judy has travelled the world consulting and creating award-winning spa concepts, beauty products and treatment experiences. She is the founder of The Chapman Guides (thechapmanguides.com), a curation of the best in retreats and wellness travel.