

SPA GOER

BY JUDY CHAPMAN



Feeling Jaded

China's "precious stone" is making a therapeutic comeback

IT COMES AS NO REVELATION THAT JADE HAS BEEN TREASURED in China since the earliest dynasties as an ornamental stone and a symbol of longevity. But its therapeutic qualities are less well known, despite the fact that jade has been employed by practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for centuries. When heated and applied to the skin, jade stones are said to help melt away muscular tension; when cool, they boost blood circulation. Indeed, in her later years, the Empress Dowager Cixi applied a jade roller to her face as a form of reflexology, to keep her skin looking fresh and healthy. And while the Chinese root character for jade is *yu*, or "precious stone," the English word is derived from the 16th-century Spanish term *pedra de ijada*, or "loin stone," so

named because of a belief that jade could cure renal colic.

Jade therapies are, in any case, newly fashionable at a growing number of luxury spas around the region, particularly in China. Take, for instance, the 2,000-square-meter spa at the **Four Seasons Hong Kong** (852/3196-8888; www.fourseasons.com), which recently added jade to its Oriental Collection of Chinese-derived treatments. The stones, polished smooth and lustrous, are used in a blissful variant of the ancient *gua sha* massage, which alternates between

HEALING HANDFUL Above: Polished jade stones at the spa at the Four Seasons Hong Kong, where therapies draw on *gua sha* massage techniques.

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SMOOTH MOVES **A jade-roller facial at Kuala Lumpur's Spa Village.**

applications of hot and cold jade to pressure points on the body. It makes for a pleasurable, almost hypnotic session—with the added bonus that contact with jade supposedly strengthens your immune system.

A variant of this can be found at the Chi Spa in Shanghai's **Pudong Shangri-La** (86-21/5877-1503; www.shangri-la.com). The Jade Journey begins with a footbath and ends with a red-tea bath ritual; in between, warm jade stones are rubbed and pressed onto your skin in scraping motions that are meant to release toxins. Not to be outdone, the spa's sister facility at the **Shangri-La Beijing** (86-10/6841-2211) offers the evocatively named—and expertly delivered—Empress Imperial Jade Journey, in which jade stones lubricated with warm aromatic oils are massaged along the body's meridian points.

In Hangzhou, Tibetan rituals inspired the Himalayan Healing Gem Massage at the exquisite lakeside **Fuchun Resort** (86-571/6346-1111; www.fuchunresort.com). Jade stones blessed with mantras are heated with a cinnamon-and-sage moxibustion stick, to encourage the flow of *qi*, the universal energy said to sustain all living beings. Back in Shanghai at **Hyatt on the**

Bund (86-21/8779-1234; www.shanghai.bund.hyatt.com), the Yuan Spa offers a humbler if no less therapeutic alternative: a foot bath of oolong tea followed by a foot rub involving marble-sized balls of jade. If only it included a pedicure!

Jade therapies are catching on outside China too. At Thailand's **Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui** (66-77/243-000; www.fourseasons.com), for example, I learned that not all jade is green. Here, the Crystal Chakra Massage uses 24 different gemstones, including velvet-smooth oblongs of green, white, and yellow jade. If you've ever tried to juggle a couple dozen eggs, then you'll appreciate why this treatment requires two therapists, who work in balletic harmony as they alternate between applying stones and soothing massage strokes.

On the other side of Koh Samui, well-being retreat **Kamalaya** (66-77/429-800; www.kamalaya.com) offers an acupuncture facial that, after the needle work is done, sees pieces of translucent jade rubbed into the skin to further tone and firm the facial muscles and improve dermal texture.

Jade is on the spa menus in Vietnam too, not surprisingly given the country's long association with TCM. At Hanoi's **Zen Spa** (310 Nghi Tam Alley, Tay Ho; 84-4/719-9889; www.zenspa.com.vn), the stones are soaked in hot water along with fresh ginger and rice wine before being placed on different pressure points of the body. And in Malaysia, where the colonial-era marriage of Malay and Chinese cultures lives on in Peranakan traditions, the **Spa Village Kuala Lumpur** (60-3/2782-9090; www.spa-village.com) offers a treat that even the Empress Dowager Cixi would appreciate: a jade-roller facial. ©