

Traditional Medicine of Sabah

Massages

By HERMAN SCHOLZ, The Flying Dusun

Massages have been developed over thousands of years as a relief from painstaking work in the fields and under the sun or in the cold; to ease birth-giving; adjust strained limbs and release tensions and much more. Massages are known to every mankind throughout the world but Asia seems to be particularly associated with this type of therapy. In this particular field Borneo remains yet again to be discovered: in Sabah, with its 32 ethnic entities, there are almost as many ways of massages. Wherever you go, the local people will have their own twists and grips for bringing an aching body in shape again, together with their abundance of medical herbs from the profuse treasure of the jungle. A massage is something wonderful to the body, and after a proper treatment one feels as light and fresh as a newborn.

Much of the traditional massage here is concerned with getting the 'wind' out of the body. This is a concept difficult to understand to most Westerners, and maybe that is the reason why local massages have not yet made it into the limelight. But what are Japanese and Swedish treatments if not 'wind treatments'? The idea of having 'wind' in one's body may be a strange concept to western people, together with 'heatiness' and 'coldness' in food and drinks. How can food be 'heaty' or 'cooling'? How can there be 'wind' in one's body? Maybe, living in temperate climates makes the body less perceptible when it comes to 'heaty' food, because the 'heat' refers to energy which in a cold country is needed. If high-energy, or high-caloric food is consumed in a hot climate you are more likely to suffer than in a cold climate, and you need a cure – such as cooling foods and drinks, whereby an ice-chilled lemon tea (or beer) is only half the answer! Wind is an altogether different beast, but every human gets it now and then. In the western world it is not known as wind, but those steady, irritating aches in your bones and muscles – that is wind. Walk in a rainy day unprotected, and you know what I mean. In a cold climate a steaming hot bath with a relaxing, or invigorating herbal mixture works wonders on the body, just like a massage. And because in Borneo bath tubs are rare we revert to massages.

With a bit of experience, you can feel 'wind' in your body yourself. Chasing the wind out takes some training and experience, maybe in combination with some therapeutic or soothing massage oils. While virtually everybody can give a basic massage, in the villages here in Sabah there are specialists for the more serious cases, and some of them have made it to certain fame. Very often, these people are also highly knowledgeable when it comes to traditional healing, and they are sought after for various cases ranging from persisting migraines over manly-hood problems, high-blood pressure and diabetes to post operational treatments after accidents. And while herbs and their concoctions are important, massages are integral part of the process.

The massage business is a lucrative one, but the truly gifted masseurs won't go bragging along, and reluctantly take remuneration for their work. But because it is a profitable business, and basic traditional massages are good for the body one finds masseurs of every description on some tamu in Sabah. It is safe to sit down and have one's back thoroughly kneaded through by these ambulant masseurs. Maybe you want to watch them first, and get reassured when you see that locals also get treated! Sometimes it is blind people who do the massages, like at one end of the Sunday Gaya Street Market in Kota Kinabalu. Sometimes the masseurs sell various oils as well, for massages, stomach aches, muscle pains, swellings, insect bites... you name it, and the business is brisk. Most of them are familiar faces on the tamu, moving from town to town, from tamu to tamu. They would not be there if what they offer was not working! A healthy rule might be to avoid those who have a microphone around their neck and a portable amplifier – though it is amusing to watch them selling their charms and love potions!

There are various types of massages offered in Sabah, and walking through our capital Kota Kinabalu you will come across institutionalised foot-reflexology studios and wellness centres. A food massage is great, but to the uninitiated primarily painful! So it is with the traditional body massage, which here is often influenced by Indonesia, or of Brunei and Malay style – only Borneo Oasis offers truly local Borneo style*. A body massage is deep and vigorous, and chasing out 'wind' might take some time. Then, in a local expression, the arteries, veins and sinews, in their bed of muscles and other body tissue, are 're-aligned' to smoothen the blood flow. This is normally done by long, penetrating strokes and sometimes with the help of a prickly-hot massage oil. It takes some time to get used to this treatment, and wincing and wriggling is not appropriate! From my own experience I have realised that it is best not to concentrate on the strokes and where it tickles: I try to relax every muscle in my body by concentrating on regular, deep breathing. Eventually, the breathing will align with the rhythm of the massage itself, and the result is wondrous! After the massage muscle sores and bone aches (as well as the pain of the massage...) are forgotten. The body feels fresh and invigorated, the mind light and enterprising! A royal treatment to compliment your holiday – maybe even to start it with to get rid of the jet-lag! All this for the fraction of the price a therapist would ask for a fancy and ruinously expensive massage in a studio in your home town to relieve your work stress!



WHERE TO STAY

Winner Hotel
Phone: 60 088 243222
Fax: 60 088 217345

Hotel Deleton
Phone: 60 088 252222
Fax: 60 088 267999

Best Western Kinabalu Daya Hotel
Phone: 60 088 240000
Fax: 60 088 263909

Berjaya Palace Hotel
Phone: 60 088 211911
Fax: 60 088 211600

Hotel Shangri-La
Phone: 60 088 212800
Fax: 60 088 212078

Likas Square Business Suites
Phone: 60 088 252233
Fax: 60 088 251122

Tang Dynasty Hotel
Phone: 60 088 263389 /
251155
Fax: 60 088 263989 / 265566

Beverly Hotel
Phone: 60 088 258998
Fax: 60 088 258778

Promenade Hotel
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Fax: 60 088 246666 / 253980

Hyatt Regency Kinabalu
Phone: 60 088 221234
Fax: 60 088 225972

Le Meridien Kota Kinabalu
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Fax: 60 088 322223

Nexus Resort Karambunai
Phone: 6 088 411222 / 411030
Fax: 6 088 411020 / 412028

Shangri-La Tanjung Aru
Resort
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/ 293306 (Reserv)
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Sutera Harbour Resort -
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Sutera Harbour Resort
- Pacific Sutera
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Imperial International Hotel
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Radius International Waterfront
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