

# For your mind, body and soul



*While she didn't come to Hanoi looking to be pampered, Sarah Gray has discovered that the city has a lot to offer in the way of salons and spas.*

Most visitors to Southeast Asia find themselves in the hands of a masseuse at one point or another. Massage, reflexology and all manner of beauty and wellness treatments abound in a region known for its ancient history of traditional medicine.

With the Asian spa industry growing quickly, Hanoi has its share of spas and salons. But similar to buying a DVD or designer handbag, it can be hard to tell the real from the fake when it comes to treating oneself.

Unlike neighboring Thailand, whose highly developed spa industry brings in 4 million visitors a year, the industry in Vietnam is still nascent.

And in contrast to the stand-alone spas and wellness centres found throughout Thailand and India, for example, most spas in Vietnam are attached to hotels in big cities like Hanoi, HCMC and Danang, or in tourist destinations like Nha Trang and Hue.

## Wellness

But although Vietnam is not yet considered a spa destination, those in the industry see it coming.

According to Yen Nguyen, Spa Manager of Elite Spa by IS Wellness, 'Compared to Thailand, the spa industry is still in its infancy in Vietnam - but there's a lot of potential growth!'

Nguyen, who studied International Spa Management in England and has worked

for top names in the industry like Six Senses and Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi, explained that the 'wellness' concept has only started to really pick up in Vietnam in the last five years.

Thus, Elite Spa, which is housed inside one of Hanoi's newest and best-equipped gyms, emphasises 'complementary therapies', that incorporate Eastern and Western techniques to treat mental and physical stress, including stress from sports.

Unlike other spas, which cater mainly to women in search of beauty treatments, Elite Spa hopes to draw in just as many men as women, as well as expatriate and Vietnamese clientele, many of whom already belong to the gym. The spa will open in April 2011.

## Stigma

But while the stereotypical spa-goer in the West may be an upwardly mobile woman with disposable income, this was not historically the case in Vietnam.

According to one Senior Manager at Thu Cuc Medical and Beauty Care, which owns one of Hanoi's oldest spas, it's harder to

