

By Barbara Perkins

MED SPA MAGNIFIQUE

World renowned for its casino, royal family and Grand Prix, glamorous Monte-Carlo also boasts some of the world's most upscale spas.

Accessed via private tunnels from Monte-Carlo's legendary Hôtel de Paris, the Thermes Marins is an adventure in luxury spa-dom. Wedged into a cliff overlooking the Mediterranean, this four-story, 6,600 square-foot pink-marble and glass structure includes Turkish baths, saunas, a heated sea-water pool, 37 treatment rooms, cardio and aquatic fitness centers, and a beauty salon, all with breathtaking panoramic views of Monaco's harbor.

Specializing in Europe's popular Thalassotherapy (from the Greek word *thalassa*, meaning "sea")—the medical use of seawater as a form of therapy—treatments include aqua gym baths, hydro-massage and marine-based skin and body treatments for rejuvenation, healing and relaxation.

The treatment menu is epic. Massage options include Thai, reflexology, lymph-draining treatments and vigorous underwater jet showers. For the body there are mud or algae wraps, Dead Sea salt peels, and scrubs. There are fitness coaches, dieticians and a medical staff.

Among the facial treatments offered is a high-frequency electro-therapy. As enticing as that sounded, we chickened out and went with your basic facial—a cleansing, firming and moisturizing treatment with Brazilian Ivo Pitanguy products that seriously wiped years of hard-earned lines.

The 90-minute Monte-Carlo Performance Combo was another fave we had to try. A signature treatment, it addresses stress-induced imbalances that lead to low energy, circulatory and inflammatory problems.

A tad mad scientist-ish, it began with an energy checkup involving a shiny hand-held metal device, a few wires, and even some finger-pinching, all of which helped the therapist discern my physiological and energetic imbalances, environmental

damages (via magnetic fields, pollution, stress, etc.), as well as the slightest emotional disturbances past or present.

As a result, my therapist selected the color green, which balances the liver and gallbladder, both of which are sensitive to stress. So, green was the color of choice for the massage oils, shea butter, bath salts and powdered precious stones such as emerald, and even for the booth lighting. I was infused with a green-colored selection of salt scrub and full-body wrap, chased by a 20-minute hydro-bath, then followed by a 50-minute massage with Rosewood and Jasmine scented oil. Sheer bliss.

As unique as Thermes Marins is, it's only one holding of the Monte-Carlo Societe des Bains de Mer or SBM group. In addition to the Hotel de Paris, the collection includes the Hotel Hermitage and the new Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel & Resort—home to the Cinq Mondes spa.

The Monte Carlo Bay Hotel is just a shuttle ride away from Thermes, situated among a trove of Moroccan-bred palm trees, with a spectacular sand-bottomed indoor/outdoor pool. Here the menu includes Balinese, Taoist and Thai massage. For anti-aging warriors, the Japanese Youthfulness Ko Bi Do ritual is a must—an acupressure massage focusing on the eyes, forehead and lips while a plant-based body oil wrap repairs dry skin.

Guest of SBM's Hôtel de Paris and Hôtel Hermitage enjoy access to the famously fabulous and celebrity-haunted Monte-Carlo Beach Club. The Olympic-size seawater pool and private beach deem it worthy of an entire day's stay. And do not leave town without dining at Le Vistamar ("sea view"), a Michelin-starred spot in the Hôtel Hermitage where you can taste what you've been looking at and what's been rubbed into you. All part of the European obsession with using the sea as a source for healing, relaxation and revitalization. Vive la mer! ☞

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Clockwise from upper left: Olympic-sized swimming pool; Massage with pink bath salts; Kera Skin Esthetics treatment room; Fitness room; Inset: The Thermes Marins solarium by night