



Five-star quality

Deputy editor Joanna Reeves visits the award-winning Spa at Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, which employs FHT members

With multiple awards acting as a testament to a commitment to excellence, The Spa at Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park is recognised for the delivery of personalised, dedicated service in a tranquil environment in which time stands still, and where signature therapy treatments help to balance clients' physical, emotional and mental well-being.

Here, the FHT talks to Carly St John, treatments manager and regional spa trainer, about what makes the award-winning spa such a success and why they choose to employ FHT members in their dedicated team of highly-skilled holistic beauty and complementary therapists.

London's finest

Following the opening of the first hotel in Hong Kong in 1963, which soon built up a reputation for luxurious service, the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group rapidly expanded into a worldwide chain of esteemed hotels, resorts and residences, with locations in an ever-increasing number of prime destinations around the world. Today, the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group operates or has under development 44 hotels in 27 countries, including ones in Asia, America, Europe, Middle East and North Africa, in addition to 14 connected residences. Remaining true to its Asian roots, the Mandarin Oriental brand is guided by its oriental heritage but influenced by local cultural diversity, and has become

instantly recognisable for its unique combination of 21st century luxury and oriental charm.

Bringing Mandarin Oriental to London in 2000, Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park offers guests views over both Knightsbridge and Hyde Park, with its holistic spa creating a haven of calm and tranquility away from the fast-paced urban environment. Having immediately established itself 12 years ago as a benchmark for outstanding service and a unique five-star client journey, The Spa's loyal client base has continued to grow over the years as more and more people appreciate its sincere understanding of and passion for physical, emotional and mental well-being. Spread over two floors, the welcoming environment of The Spa helps to relax, rejuvenate and revitalise clients, while the luxurious, stylish décor reflects

Debi Green, Spa director; says: 'The Spa at Mandarin Oriental is a haven of tranquility where the boundaries of East and West blend in harmony. Within the heart of Knightsbridge, The Spa offers the ultimate urban escape entirely dedicated to guests' well-being, providing an exclusive selection of pampering rituals designed to de-stress, relax and revitalise. The Spa at Mandarin Oriental tailors treatments to the specific needs of each guest, acknowledging their individuality.'

Above: The Vitality Pool, where clients are immersed in warm mineral water on a suspended cushion of air, while gentle hydrotherapy jets massage them

the harmonious blend of East and West that underpins every aspect of the Mandarin Oriental brand. Tranquillity pervades throughout the whole spa, from the peaceful reception area and treatment rooms, to the soothing heat and water facilities and Zen colour therapy relaxation area.

Added kudos

The Spa has a wide range of clients, including businesspeople, hotel guests, athletes and local London residents. Compared with a standalone spa, The Spa at Mandarin Oriental has the benefit of an extensive potential client base at its fingertips, with every hotel visitor a prospective client.

The excellent reputation of the five-star hotel and the exclusivity of the renowned Mandarin Oriental brand instantly adds to the kudos of The Spa by association, affording instant stature and regard that standalone spas can take a long time to achieve.

The additional benefit of being a hotel spa is the ability to incorporate other hotel facilities, such as the gymnasium and restaurants, to run an extensive range of half- and full-day spa packages and programmes, which supports the goal of providing clients with a whole experience.



Above: The relaxation area has been specially designed to help clients unwind before their treatments; each bed has its own lighting **Left:** Clients enjoy fresh fruit and exotic juice in the relaxation area before their treatments begin **Right:** Oriental foot therapy is a speciality of The Spa at the Mandarin Oriental



I enjoy most about working at The Spa is the high standard of our treatments; the attention to detail; and going above and beyond to meet our clients' needs. I can proudly say that our spa offers a wide variety of unique treatments, carried out to the highest standards, and this includes my favourite treatment, the Gaylia Kristensen 'Utopia' facial, an advanced and unique anti-age facial combining the principles of facial reflexology, massage techniques, pressure points and a pure, plant-based collagen mask. This treatment is exclusive to Mandarin Oriental and it is the only spa in the UK performing the treatment.'

Teamwork is considered key to ensure the smooth running of the spa, and the team have become so close knit that they consider themselves as a family, gaining support from both their fellow therapists and senior members of staff.

Therapists can choose to specialise in a particular area, such as facial or body treatments, or take further training to be able to provide a wider range of therapies, depending on their qualifications, skills, areas of interest, and own personal aspirations. In order to keep therapists motivated, there are opportunities for progression, in particular further training and setting future goals and targets, to keep them stimulated and passionate in their career.

East meets West

Drawing inspiration from its oriental roots, all treatments at The Spa at Mandarin Oriental combine ancient tradition with a contemporary feel, with the main focus on an individualised service to meet the different needs of each and every client. Holistic facial and body treatments are designed to fulfil the clients' desire for simple, effective and authentic spa experiences, with the established therapeutic benefits ensuring a long-lasting sustainability on the treatment menu.

The wide range of therapy treatments available include body massage for clients suffering with muscle pain and tension, with the therapist incorporating some hands-free techniques, such as the elbows and forearms, for deeper pressure without compromising their hands. Aromatherapy treatments incorporate a number of eastern and western massage techniques, while a unique session combining aromatherapy and hot stone massage provides calming, balancing and energising benefits while relieving deep-seated muscle tension.

Facials draw upon a number of different therapies and techniques, including

Carly explains that: 'The Spa experience aims to be as far removed from the busy city environment as possible – from the deliberate removal of a clock to encourage clients to completely switch off and to offer a respite from the stresses of everyday life, to suggesting clients arrive at least 45 minutes prior to their treatment time to take advantage of the heat and water facilities for deeper relaxation and additional benefits, such as improving circulation and relieving tension.'

This includes The Sanarium, offering clients a relaxing experience, and The Amethyst Crystal Steam Room, which blends heat and water through delicately-lit semi-precious stone. The Vitality Pool immerses clients in warm mineral water on a suspended cushion of air, while being gently massaged by hydrotherapy body jets. A specially designed relaxation area allows clients to unwind, escape and revitalise, with each bed having its own lighting and music, where clients rest while indulging in fresh fruit and exotic juices.

Professional excellence

The first-rate quality of service that Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park prides itself on wouldn't be possible without a team of dedicated staff, which extends to the therapists who work in The Spa, offering a range of holistic beauty and complementary therapy treatments.

Carly says: 'When recruiting therapists, Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park look for a minimum of Level 3 in facial or body treatments, but above and beyond this, a commitment to excellence and a passion for health and wellness, a pride in their work and excellent communication skills. Hiring FHT members provides Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park reassurance that the therapists are professionally qualified to a high standard and properly insured to be able to work safely and confidently.'

In order to ensure brand continuity runs throughout all aspects of the business, Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park has to ensure that therapists share and support The Spa's ethos – an understanding of and passion for a holistic approach to health and well-being; a philosophy that is supported and championed by the FHT and its members. The FHT members working at The Spa also benefit from the additional support of belonging to a professional association and the information provided in International Therapist – learning about industry news, developments in products and training, and new therapies and techniques.

Spa therapist, Ursula Walker, MFHT, says: 'I have worked as a full-time therapist at The Spa at Mandarin Oriental for the past two-and-a-half years. Having worked on five-star cruise ships around the world for many years, I wanted to continue to excel in the five-star spa industry on land, and Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park was the answer. What

aromatherapy, lymphatic massage techniques, galvanic and micro-current electrical techniques, and pressure point massage. Other specialist standalone or add-on treatments include a massage using carefully applied pressure to induce deep relaxation for those clients suffering from sleep problems; a toning and slimming body treatment to refine body contours; body wraps and body scrubs to nourish and hydrate the skin; and a specialist eye treatment to improve micro-circulation and drainage.

Signature treatments

Drawing on exotic therapies, treatments, and philosophies from around the world, Mandarin Oriental has also devised a number of exclusive Signature Rituals, encompassing oriental and Western beliefs and practices. Developed in consultation with Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) experts and aromatherapists, signature treatments combine oriental meridian massage with the therapeutic benefits of essential oils.

A thorough consultation helps the therapist to determine each client's personal and current state of well-being, to then be able to tailor the treatment and essential oils to bring balance and equilibrium to the mind, body and spirit – with a relaxing foot ritual opening each treatment and concluding with the chime of the Tibetan cymbals gently signalling the end. Clients are also given appropriate nutritional and exercise advice to support the spa programme.

The wide range of signature spa therapies offering clients with bespoke, individualised service include:

● Time rituals

Clients book time rather than specific treatments, so that the therapies and techniques can be tailored to meet each individual's needs, with the main goal to restore a natural state of equilibrium.

● Journeys

Spa journeys are designed to take clients on a sensory experience, incorporating elements from aromatherapy, crystal therapy and traditional Chinese medicine to provide a holistic, individualised treatment with restorative and re-balancing benefits.

● Oriental harmony

Two therapists work together in time and movement, providing a harmonious massage to balance and enliven the body and uplift the mind.

● Oriental essence

This massage is targeted at clients suffering from fatigue or stress, in particular businesspeople and travellers, or people with neck and shoulder tension. Focusing on areas of tension in the body, the treatment combines aromatherapy and specialist massage techniques to realign the mind and emotions.

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Above: The impressive facade of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Right: Carly St John, treatments manager and regional spa trainer



● Oriental foot therapy

Based on oriental philosophy, a combination of a foot bath, exfoliation and foot massage focusing on the energy points of the feet and ankles helps to raise natural energy and encourage the release of tension.

● Pregnancy treatment

An all-over body treatment that aims to help relieve the stresses and strains, heavy legs and aching back that is often characteristic of pregnancy, while a rejuvenating full scalp and facial massage helps to relax and revive.

Mystery shopping takes place at least twice a month to ensure that high standards are maintained and that the therapists have fully understood and incorporated into practice training for any new products or treatments, helping to take the spa forward in the right direction.

Award-winning spa

The Spa at Mandarin Oriental has won a number of awards, including:

London's Evening Standard

- Best Massage winner (2012)

Condé Nast Traveller (UK)

- Best UK Hotel Spa 2011 (5th place)
- Best UK Hotel Spa 2010 (4th place)
- Best UK Hotel Spa 2009-2002 (runner-up)

Condé Nast Traveller (UK)

- Best UK Urban Day Spa 2008-2005 (runner-up)

Condé Nast Traveller (UK)

- 8th Best Spa in the World 2009
- 24th Best Spa in the World 2011, 2008, 2007
- 5th Best Spa in the World 2006

The Independent

- Top 10 Best Spas 2010

Centurion Magazine

- Favourite Spa and Wellness Hotel Europe 2011

Quintessentially Awards

- Urban Spa of the Year 2010

Tater Spa Guide 2011

- 101 Best Spas 'Best of British' category

Spa Magazine

- 'Favorite Resort or Hotel Spa – Europe' 2008 Silver Sage Readers' Choice Awards

Luxury Spa Finder Magazine (US)

- Top Spa of the United Kingdom 2006-2004 Reader's Choice Awards

Sky Travel

- Top 10 UK Spas for Spring 2010