

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR weekend

June 5, 2003

STAYING IN

Spas make house calls

A handful of L.A. entrepreneurs will pull up, park and start pampering.

By Brenda Rees, Special to The Times

WITH work, freeway traffic and the tensions of everyday life, it's been a hard day.

It's time to step into a world of pure, luxurious pampering — a place where worries can be kneaded, scrubbed and rubbed away. Here, feet are lavishly massaged, legs are soaked, bodies are wrapped and hands are dipped in paraffin. Gentle, soothing music plays. The scent of ancient oils and herbs cleanses the air.

It's a place of calm and serenity. It's your living room?

Many in the Southland are discovering the true comforts of home when they arrange to have spa services brought to their houses. A handful of companies around Los Angeles bring professional spa services — such as massage, natural facials and body scrubs as well as reflexology and aromatherapy treatments — to those who don't wish to, or cannot, make a pilgrimage to their neighborhood spa.

Some can also arrange private yoga sessions, acupuncture and acupressure treatments, hot rock massage and Qi-Gong therapy, based on tapping the body's own healing energies.

"They make you feel like you have your own personal spa," says Shelly Mickelson of San Pedro, who gets deep-tissue massage, mini-facials and/or reflexology in her home about once a month. "They come with all the equipment — including music — and they basically transform my living room into a spa."

While many individuals are taking advantage of the luxury of a home spa, others Angelenos throw "spa parties," where guests can simultaneously revel in body treatments such as salt or sugar body scrubs or hot-oil head massages.

"Bridal showers and bachelorette parties are very popular," says Regina Fernandez, who operates the San Pedro-based Doorstep Day Spa. "It's nice to get friends together and do something different for change." "For many women, having a spa party is better than spending a night out at a bar," agrees Karen McDowell, who runs Paradiso, a spa with Redondo and Newport Beach locations.

Many providers agree that going into a client's home gives them more time with clients than they ever could have had in a traditional spa. In private homes, there is less pressure to "move one client out and get another one in" and therapists can work at a more leisurely pace.

Burbank reflexologist Irene Birmingham finds that in-home foot-massage parties help her educate people about the ancient healing art's ability to "help reduce pain and provide optimal health."

Usually headed up by one entrepreneurial soul, local in-home spa services often draw upon a professional and licensed cadre of therapists who can help fulfill clients' needs.

In-home spa services must adhere to state barbering and cosmetology laws that forbid practitioners to offer certain "invasive" treatments — such as manicures and pedicures, in which clipping, painting and polishing are performed — outside of a licensed establishment. Massage therapists need to be state certified.

As for cost, in-home services are comparable to those found in spas. A 60-minute in-home therapeutic massage typically ranges from \$70 to \$85. Therapists often add a nominal drive-time fee to the cost. Birmingham's foot-massage parties are \$15 per person for a 15-minute session.

In addition, a new market has emerged for service providers: senior citizens and the handicapped.

"People with chronic injuries or who have a hard time getting out of the house call us," says Carrie Reinagel of Whole Life Consultants Spa Services, with offices in downtown L.A. and Hermosa Beach.

And finally, having the spa come to them may be one way for hesitant hubbies and boyfriends to test the waters.

"It's easier for a man's first time to be in his own home," says Fernandez. "At home, your defenses are down and you can really get all the benefits of a massage or whatever service you want. They try it — and like it."

SIDEBAR

The reflexology theory

Apparently, your foot bone's connected to a lot more than your ankle bone. Reflexology says that nerves in the feet (and hands) correspond to all parts of the body and that stimulating certain reflex areas can increase energy and blood flow to organs and glands, improving overall health and well-being.

Pictographs in the ancient tomb of a physician in Egypt depict hands and feet being massaged, leading some to theorize that people practiced some form of reflexology then.

Modern-day reflexology was developed by American physiotherapist Eunice Ingham, who created the "foot map" reflexologists still use.

The first reflexology training workshops were conducted in 1942.

Practitioners contend that reflexology facilitates the "unblocking" of stagnant nerve impulses that can cause aches, fatigue or stress.

Reflexologists say their methods complement, rather than replace, medical treatment.

They come to you

The Doorstep Day Spa: (310) 548-3278

Paradiso: (310) 892-5266 and (714) 329-1666

Reflexology by Irene Birmingham: (818) 243-7372

Whole Life Consultants Spa Services: (310) 614-7455