

Water World

Watsu massage at Spa Bellagio is a transforming experience. By Lisa Matte

TAKE THE PLUNGE:
*Watsu treatment room
at Spa Bellagio*

“QUACK, QUACK, WADDLE, waddle.” The words to the children’s rhyme about ducks and rainy days played through my mind as we followed the leader along a winding route to the inner sanctum at Spa Bellagio. Dressed in a robe and spa slippers, I was one of about a dozen patrons scheduled for a 1 p.m. treatment.

As instructed, I had arrived a half hour before my scheduled Watsu massage. That left me plenty of time to shed my street clothes, don a cozy robe, and meander into the lounge

to sip a cool glass of citrus-infused water while waiting for a therapist to escort me to a treatment room.

The tone in the lounge was hushed. A few people carried on whispered conversations, but most of us sipped a soothing beverage and stared blankly into space or closed our eyes and leaned back into our comfortable chairs in an effort to let go of daily pressures and “to do” lists — at least for the next hour. So it was just a bit jarring when a clipboard-carrying spa associate arrived to take attendance — all eyes turned to me when she asked me to confirm that I was, indeed, wear-

ing a swimsuit under my robe (more on that later) — and escorted us to yet another waiting area.

“Quack, quack, waddle, waddle,” the sing-song phrase bounced around my brain as we rose from our perches and shuffled in a haphazard line along a long corridor. I wondered if I was the only spa-goer in the group who was surprised by the change of venue.

Located one level above the spacious — and ever-bustling — lobby at the Bellagio Las Vegas, Spa Bellagio is an oasis of calm in a city defined by dazzling neon billboards,



the constant clang of slot machines and 'round-the-clock entertainment. In stark contrast to the lobby-level din (camera-toting tourists, families hurrying up to who-knows-where, guests oohing and aahing over "the world's largest chocolate fountain"), the spa design elicits a Zen-like ambience. Travertine, granite, onyx and bleached walnut complement sleek, clean lines to create a setting that is at once contemporary and soothing. Reflecting pools, water walls and illuminated aqua-colored glass enhance the relaxed atmosphere.

I settled into a plush sofa in the



QUIET TIME:
*Meditation room
at Spa Bellagio*

second lounge and let myself be lulled by the hypnotic effect of a water wall. One by one the therapists emerged from around a bend to claim a client. Within minutes the room was empty except for me and one other woman. Then it was my turn. A therapist, also decked out in a spa robe and slippers, called my name and led me to the Watsu room, a spacious candlelit enclave centered on an illuminated pool (hence the swimsuit) filled with water warmed to body temperature. I felt as if I had stepped into a snug cocoon.

Watsu, a series of gentle movements performed in warm water, is based on the principles of Shiatsu massage. Developed in 1980 by Harold Dull, a Northern California massage therapist, Watsu explores the theory that working in water facilitates a trust between the giver and receiver while enhancing freedom of movement. The therapist supports the receiver, manipulating him or her through a series of passive movements — rocking, cradling, floating and stretching — while the warm water enhances relaxation.

Having experienced myriad forms of wraps, rubs, soaks and other spa treatments, I was eager to try something new. Watsu seemed the next logical step, but I will admit some trepidation at the thought of letting go and trusting to the degree inherent in a Watsu session. A step-by-step description of the therapy helped

allay my fears and I resolved to open myself to the best of my ability in order to reap the most benefit from the experience.

I was tense at first as the therapist gently cradled me in the water. The position somehow seemed a bit too intimate for comfort. I slowed my mind by repeating a mantra over and over again, telling myself to relax and embrace the experience as a well-earned respite from daily pressures. Gradually, I succumbed to the warmth of the water and to the gentle stretching. I lost track of time, letting myself be in the moment.

I was in a state of deep relaxation when the therapist gently floated me to the side of the pool where she eased my back against the wall signally the end of the treatment. Opening my eyes, I realized I couldn't immediately find words, still in some sort of netherworld haze.

Eventually, I made my way back to the women's locker room where I indulged in a long, hot shower and slathered my newly relaxed self in scented lotions. The "real" world was calling, but I dallied, in no hurry to compromise the sense of peace I had found in "water" world.

SPA BELLAGIO

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