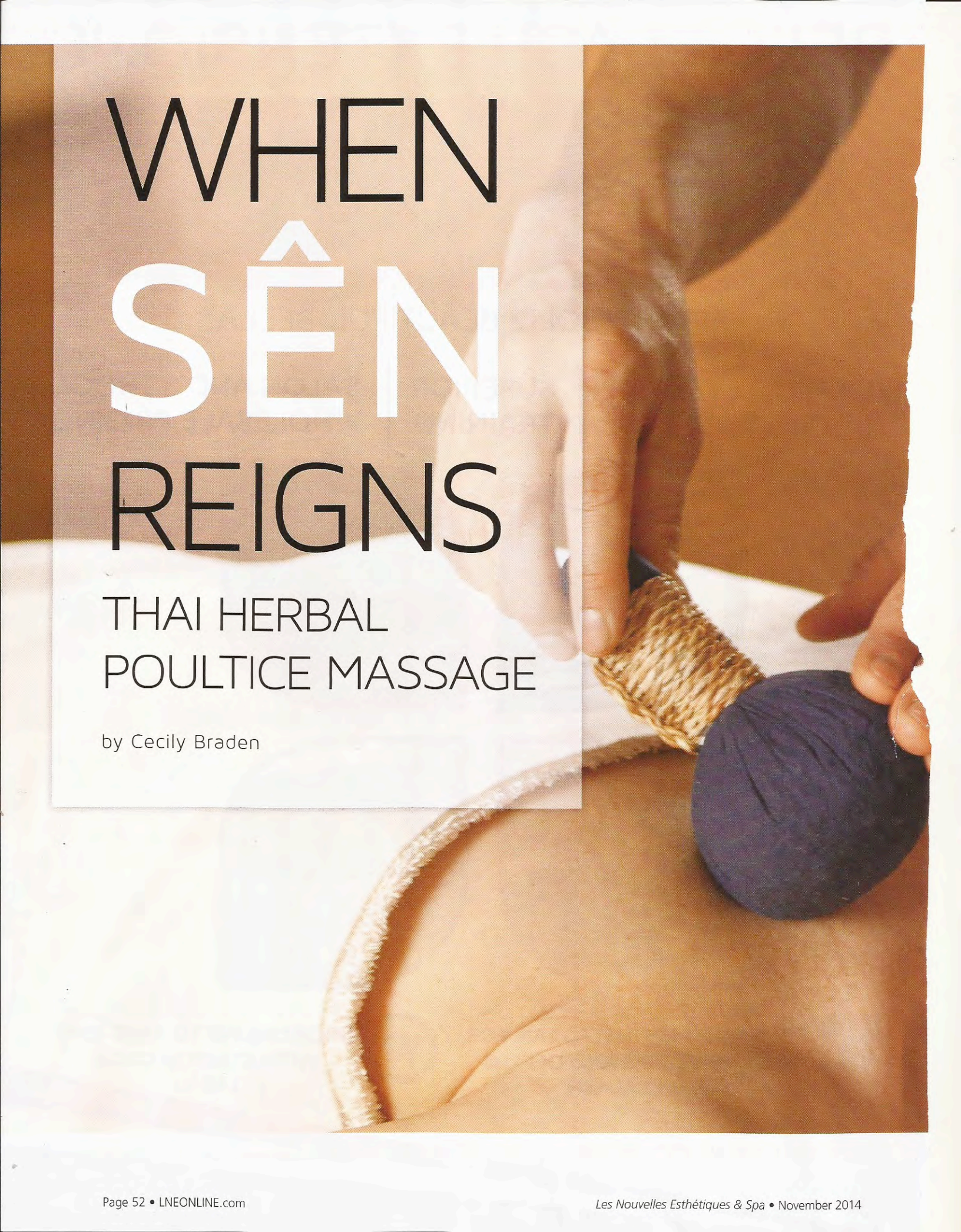


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WHEN SÊN REIGNS

THAI HERBAL
POULTICE MASSAGE

by Cecily Braden



“The Branches of Traditional Thai Medicine are Mind, Body and Energy.”

THE HERBAL POULTICE or “Luk Pra Kob” (literally translated to mean “pressing herbal sphere”) in Thai is best described as a deep heat medicinal muscle treatment that dates back to 14th century Thailand, when a hot pack was administered to soldiers returning from battle. To rejuvenate warriors, a bundle of therapeutic herbs was steamed and applied to the body to soothe aches and pains. Today, the tradition remains an integral part of Thai medicine, and is offered as a healing therapy in spas throughout the world to rejuvenate everyone from the travails of travel and corporate life to weary weekend warriors. It’s a remarkable, mindful and meditative therapy that clients love receiving and therapists love giving.

For those who have had the opportunity to be on the giving or receiving end, to describe its fullness is complex and requires delving into all aspects of Thai massage, as it is the sum of the parts that make it a true healing art.

Traditional Thai massage combines acupressure, stretching and work along energy meridians. The branches of Traditional Thai medicine are mind, body and energy, and are the foundations in which all Thai massages are performed. The emphasis is

on “energy,” since it’s believed that if flowing uninhibited, it has the power to heal the mind and body and bring it into balance.

The mindfulness and meditative nature of Thai Massage keeps the practitioner focused on imparting that healing touch with the intent to release and direct the flow of energy through the body to where it’s needed.

Visually, it’s difficult to understand the concept of Thai massage as a “therapy of energies,” and not specifically bodywork due to its physical appearance and incredible therapeutic benefits for the body. But as a practitioner, it’s essential. The intention on the flow of energy with each technique and modality is as important as the movement itself, and as with yoga, the more you study and give Thai massage, the deeper your practice becomes.

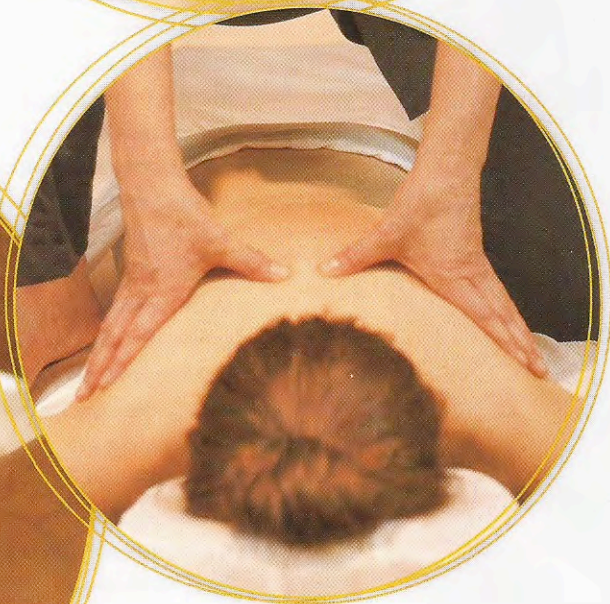
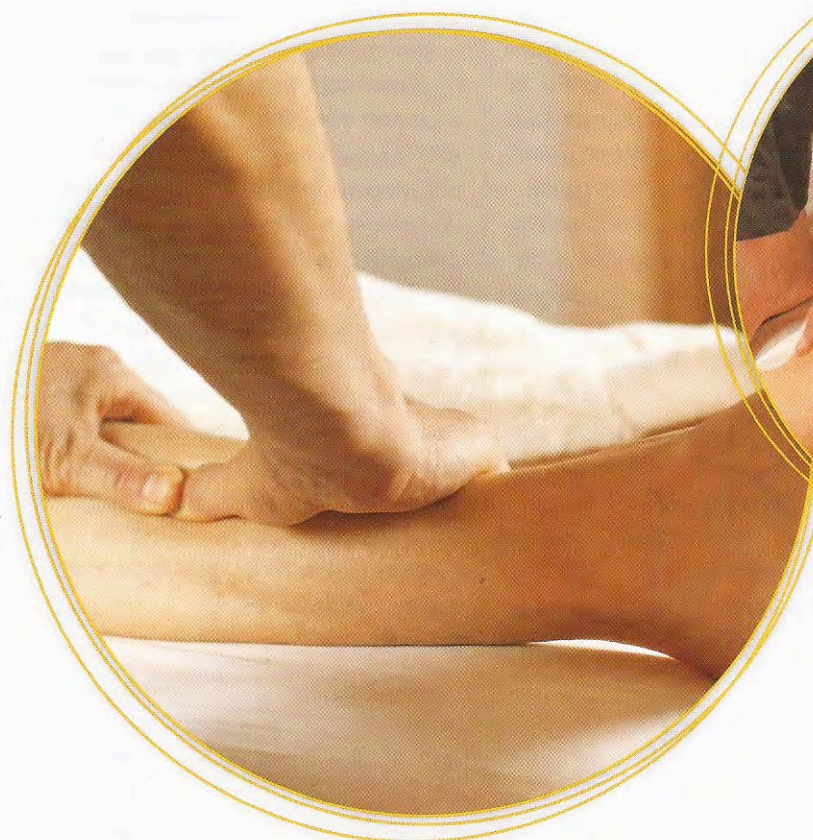
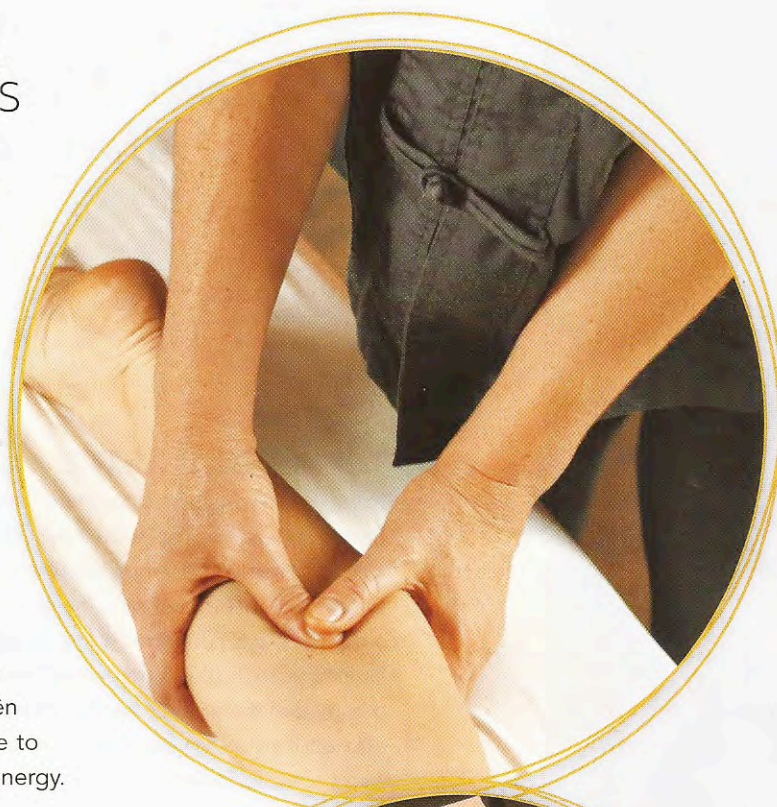
In keeping with the healing traditions of Thailand, the herbal poultice is incorporated as a tool to reinforce, connect and enhance all three essences of Thai massage. The multitude of benefits makes it the massage for all seasons and reasons.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THAI MASSAGE



THAI ACUPRESSURE & SÊN PRESSURE POINTS

Working the Thai Sên points is similar to acupressure or marma point therapy, in which pressure is applied to specific points to release blocked energy and direct healing to or away from areas of discomfort, pain or illness. In contrast to Chinese acupressure, the intention is on the release of blocked energy and not the point as it relates to a specific organ or function in the body. The belief is that when released, the natural flow of energy has a healthy and positive effect on the body as a whole. Pressure is applied using the pads of the thumb over clothing or a sheet, but shown here directly on the body to illustrate the points that follow along the Sên or energy meridians in the body. It's believed that there are 72,000 Sên points, which is not an exact number, but more to demonstrate that the body is an infinite web of energy.

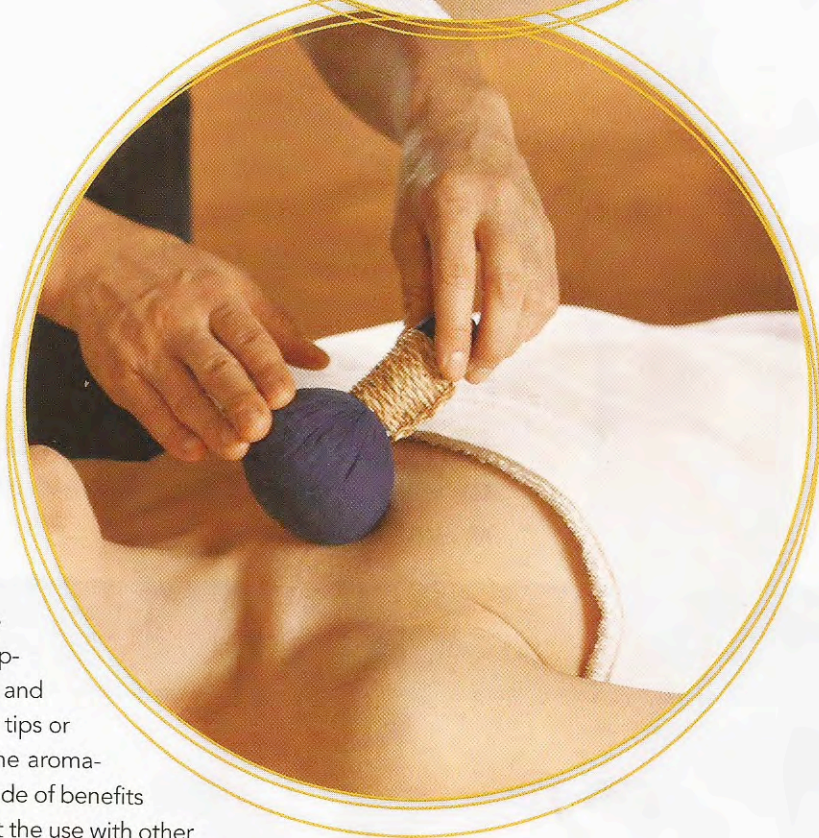


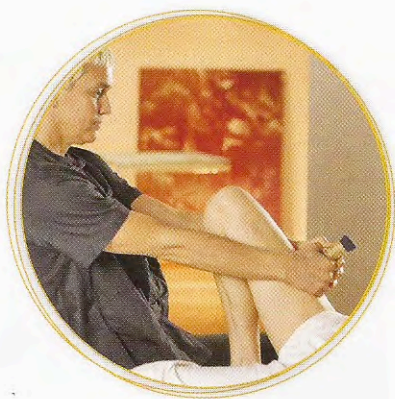


HERBAL POULTICE "LUK PRA KOB"

As with all elements of Thai massage, using the herbal poultice is an art form, and with practice, it becomes an extension of your hand. The compress, filled with dried organic herbs and essential oils, is wrapped in muslin, steamed and applied directly to the body with a variety of techniques and pressure. The heat combined with the herbs is absorbed and helps ease muscle aches and pain, alleviates stiff joints, stimulates circulation, detoxifies and releases stagnant energy in the body.

Ginger, lemongrass, camphor and turmeric are the most common herbs, but other blends are available, or can be made using kaffir lime, eucalyptus, cinnamon, sesame seeds, pikul (Thai Jasmine) and indigo (as shown in the photo). Rose tips, lavender tips or chrysanthemum tips may be added to enhance the aromatherapy quality of the compress. Due to the multitude of benefits and blends, the herbal poultice is not limited to just the use with other massage modalities, but can also be an effective way to increase the benefits of a scrub, body mask, facial or hydrotherapy service. Proper training is recommended.





THAI STRETCHING

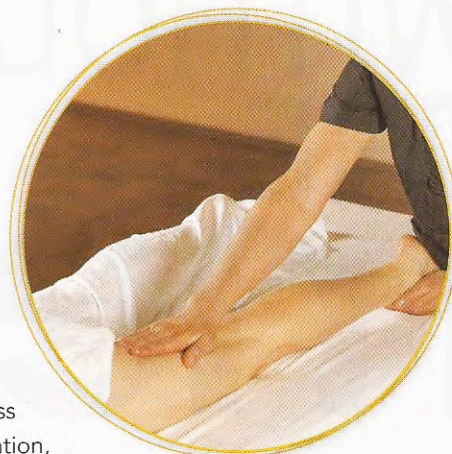
Simple stretches are combined with the herbal poultice with the complexity based on the therapist's level of training. The heat warms the muscles and allows for increased flexibility and range of motion. Traditionally, this form of bodywork is performed on the floor with the client wearing comfortable clothes that allow for movement (proper draping is substituted for clothing).



AROMATHERAPY MASSAGE & SÊN MERIDIANS

Traditionally, oil is not used in Thai massage. However, here we have combined the herbal poultice with hands-on movements that support the release and flow of energy in the body following the Thai Sên meridians. Each movement is carefully choreographed to reinforce the healing intention of Thai massage and work in synergy with all three massage modalities to create the whole.

The use of aromatherapy oil with traditional Thai essential oils such as lemongrass and ginger help soothe nervous tension, relax cramped muscles, reduce fluid retention, improve lymphatic drainage, nourish the skin and direct the flow of energy through the body. When using oil, do it after application of the herbal poultice to avoid blocking the absorption of the herbs. ■



The Herbal Poultice Massage is an effective and affordable therapy that's offered by individual massage therapists, day spas and resort spas throughout the world. The treatment price ranges from **\$125** to **\$350**.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

- Allergies to any of the herbs utilized
- Lack of skin sensitivity
- Skin sensitivity to heat or chemicals
- Burns
- Cuts
- Sensitive scars
- Varicose veins
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure

✿ Euphoria Spa

New York City, N.Y.
Hot Herbal Poultice
90 Minutes, \$215

✿ Mandala Medspa

Sarasota, Fla.
Samunprai (Means "herb" In Thai)
90 Minutes, \$150

✿ Ritz Carlton

Dallas, Texas
Thai Herbal Poultice Massage
80 Minutes, \$225

■ Ritz Carlton

Half Moon Bay, Colo.
75 Minutes, \$245 (Weekday)
or \$260 (Weekend)

✿ Ritz Carlton

Naples, Fla.
Sea Holistic Poultice Massage
80 Minutes, \$240

✿ Greenwich Hotel

New York City, N.Y.
Samunprai Thai Poultice
90 Minutes, \$325

✿ Visions

Novi, Minn.
Indigo Poultice Thai Massage
80 Minutes, \$135

◆ Maroma Resort

Riviera Maya, Mexico
Hot, Healing Poultice Massage
105 Minutes, \$283.50



Cecily J. Braden is the founder of Beauty Secrets Global Spa Imports. She has spent the past 19 years educating spa professionals in the United States,

Canada, Mexico, Asia and Europe. The Beauty Secrets global spa treatment guide offers a full range of holistic spa therapies with products sourced from around the world.