

Zen Escape



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Aristo by Serena Spa at the Grand Mercure Hotel in Bangalore is the perfect place for a Zen-like state of relaxation

Lord Buddha has the unique ability of infusing a sense of peace and Zen. When I entered the Aristo Spa located in the Grande Mercure Hotel at Bengaluru, I felt the same sense of calm. Perhaps it had to do with the huge golden-hued Buddha face that welcomed me to this contemporary spa. Being located in a business hotel, the Aristo spa is perfect destination for tired urbanites.

## **Décor Details**

Aristo Spa is a contemporary urban spa brand by Serena Spa offering a selection of international and Indian based spa experiences. The spa is spread across 2400 square foot and has four treatment rooms including one couple suite. The best part is that each room comes all equipped with personal steam and shower areas. After treatment the guest can spend time in the relaxation area, offering a comfortable and private space for reflection. The Spa Salon specializes in the latest hair styling, pedicure and manicure and is located in a separate area. The spa and salon offers a seamless beauty and energy restoration destination offering an urban spa oasis where a few moments of personal attention can restore the energy of the modern day busy executive and homemaker. As a basic requirement the Aristo Spa design philosophy specifies inspiration from traditional Indian building methods, non-toxic and environmentally friendly materials and elements reflecting the space where the spa is constructed. “The design is based on contemporary Indian design elements sprinkled with traditional artifacts and photos of historical sites and as a concept every piece of furniture and equipment is designed and manufactured in India,” says Sabrina F.B. Hougaard, Director of Operations and Training, Serena Spa Pvt. Ltd. Regional flavors is the common thread that binds the hotel and spa. Images from Hampi- a place of cultural and archaeological interest, dot the walls of the spa and the colors chosen are also in tandem with local flavors. The relaxation area is done up tastefully with comfortable cane chairs set against a black and white carpet which runs from the walls to the floor. Each chair is separated using sheer curtains that add a charm of its own to the entire space. The entire spa is in a similar colour scheme using tones of beige, brown, black and cream that make it visually appealing as well.

## **Treatments**

The spa menu is extensive and offers a variety of massages and wraps. The attached salon has pedicures, manicures, facials, waxing, threading, haircuts and shampooing services. “There is no doubt that the Bliss Full Body Massage is the most popular treatment in general, but during the monsoon season, nothing beats the 60 minutes Hot Stone Massage. It is believed that water-smoothed stones harness the vitality and energy of the waters that have long washed over them in this popular treatment heated stones collected from the river beds of South India are used. The deep penetrating heat of the stones combined with traditional massage strokes relieves tension and sore muscles,” says Hougaard. All products used for spa treatments are of Serena Spa’s own brand, manufactured exclusively in India. Many treatments require fresh ingredients, such as fruits which are sourced locally. In the salon products from Moroccan Oil, a US based brand is used. The region and location does influence the spa menu. Local flavors are accentuated with the incorporation of local fruits and produce in the menu for the scrubs and wraps.

## **Detox Massage**

I was advised to take the detox massage and I was explained it had been formulated blending the purity of ancient herbal formulations with modern day spa techniques. With the onset of monsoon this special detox massage has been devised harnessing the goodness and cooling properties of neem, tulsi and aloe vera. Again it is during the rainy season that the atmosphere is cool and relatively dust free which helps the skin pores to open and facilitate maximum absorption of herbal and medicinal oils. The massages are completely oil-free and are formulated using the paste of these three ingredients. “We have combined ancient herbal knowledge with modern day spa techniques to create a wonderful and efficient combination of neem, tulsi and aloe vera. Neem relieves dry skin, soothes itching, redness and skin irritation; it also combats bacterial infections, such as acne. Extracts of Tulsi, the holy plant also known as Basil, is anti-fungal and anti-bacterial – and a great mosquito repellent. It is effective in removing excessive oil from the skin. Aloe Vera is claimed to be useful in the treatment of wound and burn healing, also improves healing of minor skin infections and is also thought to be beneficial for sufferers of diabetes. We have mixed these traditional herbal ingredients to create a new detox body massage – the natural oil contents of neem, tulsi and aloe vera make this not only a very pleasant experience, but also a reviving tonic for your skin,” explains Hougaard. My therapist Rakhi knew her job since she came with over 8 years of experience and even said that this was a three-in-one process since there was a massage, wrap and exfoliation all in one. Applying the delicately fragrant mix all over my body in circular movements, she made sure I was comfortable throughout. There is a selection of music available in each room and the soft strains of the instrumental notes elevate the experience a notch higher. After the massage, my masseur wrapped my body and also massaged my face. The last part was a relaxing head massage that completed the treatment. After a shower, my skin felt soft and supple and I felt rejuvenated and relaxed. Sipping a glass of herbal tea, post the session convinced me that at a price of `2250+tax, this treatment was totally worth it.

### Overcoming Challenges

Spa design in a busy place like a hotel is always a challenge as it has to take into consideration the normal functioning of the hotel, such as noise, service infrastructure, technical installations, guest convenience et cetera. In the case of Aristo Spa at Grand Mercure the location is in a quiet corner of the hotel, right next to the pool and easily accessible for both in-house guests and outside people visiting the spa. “The main challenge was transmission noise from the air-conditioning system which in a normal room can be ignored, but in the tranquility of a spa will feel very disturbing. We solved the problem by simply installing separate AC systems for each room – with the added advantage that we can switch it off when not in use and thereby save precious energy,” says Hoggaard. Being a spa salon it was also important to carry over the warm and pampering experience of the spa. “A spa requires natural materials, yes also easy to maintain and clean. We chose a combination of glass mosaic tiles for the walls of the central relaxation area and all showers cum steam rooms are made with locally available grey granite,” says Hougaard. Since spa lighting is always a challenge as it has to be sufficient to ensure safety, bright so that the spa therapists can perform detailed services such as facials and yet subdued to ensure the guest feels comfortable and relaxed, the modern lines with delicate lighting and the floor plan have been designed for the benefit of the guest and the staff. In fact there is excellent use of LED lights in the form of votive candles as one enters the spa through a small passage that

sets the tone for what to expect inside! Head to the Aristo Spa for an experience to rejuvenate your mind and soul. Indulge.

### Trivia

- Name of the spa and year of establishment: Aristo Spa & Salon at Grand Mercure was opened in April 2009.
- Timings of the spa: The spa is open daily from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Number of estheticians: The total spa team consists of 7 people.
- Name of the architect & interior designer:
  - Spa layout: Serena Spa Pvt. Ltd
  - Architecture and Interiors: PRAXIS, Bangalore – Mr. Rajiv Majumdar
- Name of the owner/spa director: The spa is operated by Serena Spa Pvt. Ltd.  
[www.serenaspa.com](http://www.serenaspa.com).