

Say Spahhhh

An ancient healing massage works out 21st century kinks at Island Rose Spa

Island Rose Spa's invitation to test drive a massage could not have come at a better time. My late-summer schedule was packed with work and life commitments and I felt frayed at the edges. This year's self-care resolution was as faded a memory as New Year's Eve.

After checking out their extensive massage menu online, I decided to skip to the chase and ring the spa for a recommendation. The receptionist was a delight, guiding me towards a treatment that made sense for my various concerns: stiff, old, perpetually overwhelmed.

"Have you ever tried cupping?" she asked. With an audible intake of breath, I

responded, "No, but I want to!"

Island Rose Spa offers a Gua Sha Myofascial Release massage that includes cupping - a centuries-old method using suction to work on fascia (animal horns were originally used; we've since moved on to glass and silicone). Gua sha is a treatment that uses a flat stone in an almost scraping motion during the massage (this sounds worse than it is; it's actually very gentle) to stimulate blood flow, which promotes healing and loosens fascia.

For the uninitiated, fascia is the connective tissue that holds muscles (as well as organs, blood vessels, bones, and nerves) in place. Made up of collagen, healthy

fascia is malleable; it bends and stretches. However, since fascia also has nerve endings, it can tighten up for a host of reasons, including muscle overuse, a sedentary lifestyle, and stress. Tight fascia - not the muscle under it - is often the reason for our aches and pains.

So adding cupping to the massage not only also continues to work the fascia but also stimulates lymphatic flow - exactly what my overworked and overwhelmed body needed. I was all in.

Arriving at Island Rose Spa is like walking into a wellness portal. The soothing space is done in coastal hues. Grays, whites, and ocean blues complement the serene beach



Tanquility begins at the reception area of Island Rose Spa



Massage therapist Amiel DeGuzman offers bespoke massages tailored to each client

Photos courtesy of Island Rose Spa



The spa is centered on holistic wellness, which is reflected in the skin care lines it retails

scenes snapped by local photographers framed on the walls. My therapist, Amiel DeGuzman, directs me to a treatment room, its motif the same soothing vibe. We talk for a bit about my past experience with massage (always painful, hence minimal) and why I'm opting for this particular treatment.

While I'd get more relaxation with deeper massages like Swedish, DeGuzman felt the cupping was better suited to address my concerns "because you're actually working

the muscles, increasing blood flow."

He explains that the cupping combined with the gua sha is a good choice for someone who is active. "We're talking about athletes, bodybuilders because their muscles are so taut. For lymphatic drainage, it's ideal. I don't use the cups as deep, not for the first time, but you will feel the benefits of it." Because he planned to go lighter, he explains, it won't leave unsightly marks on my skin (shout-out to US swimmer Michael

Phelps in the 2016 Olympics).

DeGuzman exits and leaves me to disrobe and I slide into the comfy massage bed and force the day's tasks out of my brain, focusing on the meditative music playing in the background. He returns with an assortment of different sized silicone cups that "look like the tops of Yankee Candles."

After tucking a bolster under my knees to release tension in my back, DeGuzman begins the massage on my face with some



Island Rose Spa offers a range of spa services, including a full spectrum infrared sauna

light strokes using the gua sha stone, paying extra attention to my jaw line (yup, I'm a teeth grinder). Because the stone gives an even pressure, he's able to go a little deeper without using any force.

Then he moves to the neck, working on the sternocleidomastoid muscle, which feels a little weird. DeGuzman explains that clients often don't want that area massaged, but, "it's such a prevalent muscle in relation to your head and neck, it should get worked."

It was time to move onto the bigger and more problematic areas of my body. DeGuzman used the friction of the gua sha stone to warm up my muscles before applying the cups, which he left in place only for about 30 seconds each, moving them along my muscles, finding the tight spots and applying the suction to release tension. Depending on what he felt, he'd cup the same spot repeatedly, add more gua sha friction, or manipulate the muscle with his hands. Each decision was made based on how my body reacted, making it a truly bespoke service.

Surprisingly, none of this hurt. I don't get massages often because I find them exceedingly painful. Under DeGuzman's expert hands, discomfort was minimal, allowing me to actually decompress.

When the massage was over (pro-tip, treat yourself to the 90 minutes; the time flies) and I slid out of the bed, the first thing I noticed was the pain I carried in my hips for months was gone. My muscles felt loose and limber. I was relaxed, but I didn't feel like I needed a nap, so I could go about the rest of my day.

This treatment did not feel like an indulgence; it felt like a necessity – so much so, I purchased three more treatments to ensure I keep up my 2022 resolution.

ISLAND ROSE SPA

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