

QLD: Middle East has come to Brisbane

By Diana Plater (with pix AAP180-182)(with Travel NSW/Qld Club)

BRISBANE, AAP - A little bit of the Middle East has come to the Brisbane CBD.

An Opal Rasul steam temple is part of the new Stephanie's Spa Retreat at Sofitel Brisbane.

The idea came from when people lived in tents and didn't have bathrooms. They'd pour mud on their skins and have a weekly or even monthly mud bath and then allow steam to hydrate them. It's a detox treatment that is apparently still used in the hamams (and once was also used in harems!).

Stephanie's has copied the ritual, with the aim of taking a visit to the spa to another dimension. The rasul treatment should be ideally followed by meditation or a massage.

A visit there almost sounds scary. When there's two people involved it's described as "an uplifting soul strengthening journey guaranteed to evoke warmth and passion for couples seeking the ultimate innovative escape".

I prefer it alone.

First you are given three different muds, one for the face, one for the parts of the body that really need detoxing (the thighs, stomach and buttocks) and one for the rest of the body. I felt like I was covered in neapolitan icecream.

And then the steam starts and all you can see are the stars above your head (they're painted on the ceiling).

I thought I was pretty brave for a claustrophobic. But at one point I found myself huddled next to the door, just in case I needed a quick exit. But then I lay down on the marble bench and totally relaxed.

After 20 minutes, the steam retreats, the lights come on and you take a shower and then, rugged up in one of the spa's fluffy robes, you make your way to the massage room. Afterwards there's herbal tea or water in the "tranquility" room.

Stephanie's has seven suites including a twin spa suite designed to allow friends or partners to share the spa experience.

There's fresh flowers, the glow of burning candles, soothing music and the scent of essential oils.

Owned by Stephanie Shepherd, who also runs another spa in the Brisbane suburb of Bulimba, the spa is on level three next to the hotel's pool deck.

It offers the latest in international spa treatments using Payot and Thalgo products as well as Stephanie's own body and bath lines.

Sofitel Brisbane guests can also now watch the sun rise across the city as they do their morning exercise in the newly opened gym, SoFit, on the hotel's 30th floor.

And for those who visit hotel gyms but haven't a clue what to do you can engage the services of an innovative Virtual Gym Instructor. Jim Instructor, an interactive touch screen program, offers visual instruction on how to use the state-of-the-art equipment as well as advice on stretching exercises and workout routines.

IF YOU GO:

Sofitel Brisbane leisure packages start from \$195 per night for two including complimentary daily newspaper, French "Roger & Gallet" bathroom amenities, buffet breakfast and a bottle of sparkling wine on arrival.

Sofitel Spa Escape includes overnight Classic Room accommodation for two, one 40 minute essential massage, a nurturing warm oil, Swedish, remedial or deep tissue treatment and buffet breakfast for two from \$274 per night.

Sofitel Spa Revival includes one 90-minute Hot Stone Massage, a deep muscle relaxation experience, with overnight accommodation for two including a bottle of sparkling wine and two buffet breakfasts from \$344.

There are other spa packages also available.

Details: call (07) 3835 3535 or visit www.sofitelbrisbane.com.au

* The writer was a guest of the Sofitel Brisbane.

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