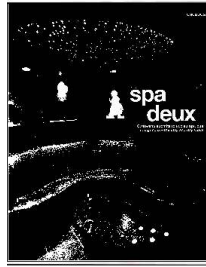


escapes.

spa de deux

Qweekend submits to two sumptuous indulgences - the stay and day spa. ▶



detox/retox

At Brisbane's Sofitel Hotel, you can treat your body as the temple it is before ever so gently trashing it.



Words **Christine Middap**

There is only one good thing about detoxing – and that's retoxing. Preferably as quickly as possible. And so we found ourselves, in the course of one blissful afternoon at an inner Brisbane hotel, enjoying a lengthy cleansing and rehydrating spa ritual only to retire upstairs to our room to polish off the best part of a bottle of bubbly before heading downstairs for cocktails and dinner.

I'm sure the folk at Stephanie's Spa at the Sofitel will be disappointed to hear this: all the effort they put into their spa treatments wasted in such a wanton fashion. But let me assure them that there's something to be said for a detox/retox package. It's a bit like strawberries and cream, vodka and orange. One balances out the other – in mind, if not in body.

And this was not a detox in a conventional sense, although the mud we slathered over ourselves as we sweated it out sauna-style in the Opal Rasul Temple (*pictured, previous page*) no doubt had a cleansing effect. Sitting in this bronze and turquoise mosaic bunker, lit only by a couple of small candles and tiny twinkling stars above, was a most unusual start to our weekend escape.



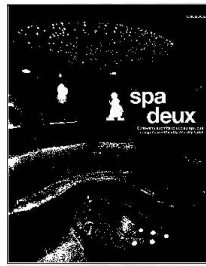
You don't have to stay at the Sofitel to use Stephanie's Spa but the hotel has put together a range of packages for couples celebrating a special occasion, or for those who want to get away from it for a night without really leaving home.

Our Sofitel Signature Spa package included a two-room suite on the 29th level with views over the city, an hour-long session in the temple followed by an hour long massage each, bubbly and chocolate-dipped strawberries in our room and in-room breakfast (or take breakfast at Club Sofitel on level 30, which has some of Brisbane's best views). We made a night of it with cocktails in

MUSTDO.

STAY in and make use of the hotel's facilities. The Club Sofitel lounge is a great spot to while away a few hours. Or check out the pool and gymnasium.

EXPLORE the Andy Warhol exhibition. The hotel has a package including accommodation, breakfast, two tickets to the exhibition at GoMA, and VIP use of the gallery's members lounge from \$275 per night. It's on until March 30.



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the hotel's newly refurbished bar, Cuvée (it has an extensive champagne, cocktail and martini menu), followed by dinner in Thyme2 restaurant, which has also had a makeover.

After a 2pm check-in we headed straight for the spa where we were ushered into the temple. It had been one of those sticky, humid Brisbane mornings and I didn't relish the thought of more sweat. But once inside I forgot about that as we dry-brushed our bodies in preparation for the three muds we were to paint on ourselves or each other. This is DIY territory, the therapist gives you a rundown and then leaves you to it. And so we sat for a good 30 minutes in the herbal steam until a light shower of rain signalled the end and automatic lighting directed our way to the shower.

Then into our robes (light cotton ones would have been preferable to the hot heavy numbers we were issued with) and out to the double massage room for a side-by-side massage by two therapists whose hands and elbows must surely have been fitted with knot-seeking sensors. Back in our room, bordering on lethargic, an in-house movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, on the new LCD television (there were two in our suite) gave us time to recharge before the retox stage of the evening.

The Sofitel has spent big on its downstairs makeover and the smartly furnished bar was full with couples and families lounging on couches or perched on bar stools. The restaurant was also busy, with most people going for the quaintly titled "interactive dining experience", formerly known as the buffet. We chose à la carte, feasting on chicken liver parfait and blue swimmer crab cakes for starters, and wood-smoked snapper and the signature dish, fillet of beef with Café de Paris sauce. Hotel restaurants can still, often unfairly, suffer from a snob factor but this was an inviting menu with well-executed food and an impressive wine list. The buffet appeared fresh and extensive.

Thankfully it was just a lift-ride to bed. Unlike most hotel rooms, even those boasting five-stars, this one's bed was soft and enveloping. Although after a day of such decadence I probably could have slept on the floor.

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www.stephanies.com.au

THE DEAL Leisure packages start from \$255 per room per night. The Signature Spa package is \$790 per night (check website for inclusions).

OWEEKEND WAS A GUEST OF THE OPERATORS