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MTWTFS-

Middle Eastern mud bath the best, spa none

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. 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 ice-cream.

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.