



# Holistic healing in Bali

Halotherapy and Himalayan pink salt. 24-carat gold facials. The wisdom of European monks and an Egyptian queen.

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Bali has long been known for its long stretches of stunning white sand beaches, with its perfect crescent waves drawing surfers from all corners of the Earth. Its moderate Hindu people are friendly and welcoming, while its ancient culture is intricately depicted in exquisite temples and elaborate dances. Of late, another popular but lesser-known attraction has cropped up: spa and beauty tourism.

A little bit of digging showed that Cocoon Medical Spa, a new establishment on the Indonesian island, won numerous awards including the 2013 Best Spa in Bali Yak Award, and AsiaSpa's Asia Medi-Spa of the Year. Its website told enticing tales of futuristic sounding "3D skin rejuvenation," 24-carat gold facials, and a detoxifying salt cave. I was enthralled. I jumped at the chance to head back to the Indonesian island which I'm so fond of in order to experience some of the best beauty treatments in the region.

The owner of Cocoon, Louise Cogan, is something of a medical tourism pioneer in Southeast Asia. She converted a printing factory into a luxe high-ceilinged wellness facility with glass pods as medical rooms.

Cocoon, which opened in 2013, may not be the only medical spa in Bali but it differentiates itself by offering holistic healing such as detox, colon hydrotherapy, infrared sauna, and salt room treatments. Says Ms. Cogan: "Cosmetic results are not just about jabbing a few needles. True anti-aging is about looking after the body and mind, ridding the toxic waste and aligning the hormones and health through vitamins. Approaching both the wellness and cosmetic together will bring better cosmetic results, faster."

Medical spa tourism is becoming popular in Bali. And though Cocoon may have been the first and best executed business to latch on, others have followed suit. The ultra-luxurious W Seminyak, for example, flew in celebrity facial expert Su Man-Tsu to pamper its guests with super-powered facials that—word has it—are as effective as Botox. The target market for the industry is Australians, whose dollar is strong in Bali (well, everywhere) and whose high-priced services (well, everything) drive them to seek the more expensive treatments while on holiday in lower-priced areas.

Ms. Cogan, using her extensive knowledge of both the medical tourism industry and Southeast Asia (she's lived in the region for over 10 years), forecasts that Bali will soon begin receiving the same kind of attention from medical tourists as Thailand and Malaysia. Given that Thailand saw 2.5 million foreign visitors cross its borders for the purposes of medical treatments in 2012, this is no small statement.

Located in Legian, the Goldilocks of Bali's famous strip (since it's a comfortable middle between the rowdy Kuta and the posh Seminyak), Cocoon Medical Spa stands out among the many shopfronts lined up along the busy highway. Its eye-catching wooden facade resembles a series of ladders haphazardly lined up beside each other. Behind this thicket stands a wall of crystal-clear glass. It sounds strange, but it works in a neo-modern abstract way.

Stepping inside the glass doors, I was transported into a contemporary world of frosted glass treatment rooms lined on either side of a thick concrete slab-lain pathway. Soaring ceilings allowed the light from the glass front-

age to flood the modern indoor spa world with light. At this point, I was escorted to the back where I was handed a detailed form in which I was to fill out my personal information. A doctor came to greet me and took my information in with a thoughtful smile, before escorting me through the polished concrete doorway of a treatment room for my first treatment: diamond microdermabrasion.

It's here that I really began to grasp the concept of a medical spa. The treatment room was clinically clean with a full-on white color scheme, but the treatment bed was far more comfortable than I would have expected. My comfort was clearly a huge concern to the doctor who was treating me—which is where the word spa comes in.

I lay down on the bed and the doctor began by washing my face. Next, she took out what looked like a pen attached to a long tube. The doctor took the time to show me the tip of the "pen," which is called the micro scrubber. This works with ultrasonic waves, I later learned, to shake loose the top layer of my skin. Meanwhile, the vacuum pump attached to the long tube sucked it all up. It felt like she was using that suction tube the dentist always sticks in your mouth, and dragging it all over my face. It certainly was not painful in any way—just a bit of a strange sensation. The whole process took about 15 minutes.

Next, the doctor told me they were going to give me LED light therapy. For this, I didn't even have to move. She just covered my eyes and swung a robotic lampshade-looking device so that it was hovering about six inches from my face.

LED light therapy is actually a treatment developed from NASA research, based on the concept that certain frequencies of light can significantly increase new tissue growth. If you can think back to your early high school biology class, you'll remember learning about photosynthesis. It's the same idea: skin cells receive pulses of light energy, which the cell then converts into fuel, which in turn stimulates the cell to create proteins and lipids that give it that much-desired plump, healthy look (and I have to say that a few weeks after the treatment, I really notice a difference).

### PINK SALT, GOLD MASKS

After my treatment in this particular room was finished, I was led down the concrete slab pathway once again. I went up a shiny white winding staircase, into the famous salt room—the first ever in Indonesia. I was in for a treat.

The doctor told me that while I was deeply inhaling the healing and detoxifying air produced by the solid pink bricks of Himalayan rock salt that lined the walls of the room, I'd receive a Balinese foot massage and simultaneously have a 24-carat gold mask work its magic on my face.

The concept of a salt room is centuries old. Hundreds of years ago, European monks discovered that patients suffering from respiratory problems recovered faster when treated inside natural salt caverns. On top of that, it was later discovered that salt miners were in better general health, not just than other miners, but than regular people.



Despite these discoveries, it wasn't until the 1960s that the first halotherapy (halo means salt in Greek) chambers were constructed by man. Salt rooms are now increasing in popularity, as they become known for treating all kinds of ailments including stress, headaches, lethargy, and depression, while also dramatically increasing energy, mental alertness, and overall well-being.

Pink salt bricks of various shades made up the walls of the salt room, lit from behind to give off a frosty rose glow. As I laid my head down on the pillow, I remembered the doctor's orders for me to take deep, calm breaths. I did so, and noticed that there wasn't really a particular smell given off by the bricks. The air just seemed clean and fresh.

Of course, I thought to myself, I've never noticed salt to have a smell before, so why would it now? The masseuse approached me with a shiny yellow-hued jelly-like mask with flecks of gold sparkles in it, and carefully

placed it on my face. The gold mask was cold and refreshing. Cleopatra supposedly wore one to bed every night, believing it to be the secret to youthful skin. The metal has also been used for thousands of years in Ayurvedic medicine.

Gold is said to fight wrinkle-causing free radicals in the skin, while strengthening the skin's elasticity. It also slows melanin creation and reduces age-spots. The Egyptian queen was definitely on to something. The mask was removed from my face and placed into its original packaging. Apparently I could bring it home with me and reuse it a few more times.

At this point, my incredible spa session at Cocoon Medical Spa was over. I took one final look around, said goodbye to the friendly staff, and promised myself to return another day. §

## INCIDENTAL INTELLIGENCE

### WHERE TO STAY

#### Chandra Luxury Villas Bali in Jalan Sari Temuku (Gang Sandat), Seminyak - Kuta, Bali

These exquisite designer villas successfully blend ultra-chic design with a traditional Balinese open-plan layout that is out of this world. Ideal for groups of friends and family holidays, Chandra Villas provides the atmosphere of a private villa with all the over-the-top hospitality of a five-star resort. You'll even have your own private chef let himself in come morning and prepare you a scrumptious breakfast while your eyes adjust to the daylight. Take a dip in the private pool, or lounge the day away on one of the plush loungers surrounded by vibrant, exotic Balinese plantlife. This is heaven. [chandrabilivilla.com](http://chandrabilivilla.com)

#### The Seminyak in Jalan Kayu Aya, Seminyak Beach

For those who prefer the convenience of a more traditional hotel set-up, the Seminyak is a friendly, welcoming, and palatial abode for your stay in Bali. The rooms are well-appointed, with beach views and luxurious amenities, including take-home aromatherapy bath products. Buffet breakfast is served in an open-air pavilion a short walk from the rooms on the way to the beach. The real treat here is the expansive pool which runs parallel to Seminyak's beautiful coast. Its infinite edge makes you feel as if you were swimming in the powerful ocean—a far safer alternative when the current is strong, which is often the case. Guests will find all sorts of different nooks and crannies in this pool in which they can enjoy fresh cocktails from the poolside bar. When the pool water gets too much, there are a plethora of comfy sun loungers to dry out on. [www.theseminyak.com](http://www.theseminyak.com)

#### Kupu Barong in Ubud, Bali

For those looking to check out Bali's cultural heart, Kupu Barong is the easy choice. Nestled in a hillside overlooking the lush Ayung River Valley and often populated by white-water rafters, these wooden villas are naturally luxurious. The villas were built in the traditional Balinese style, but with modern and innovative touches. The panoramic view is made all the better just before evening, as the golden sun sinks into the forest in the distance. Don't miss the on-site Mango Tree Spa by L'Occitane, with its highly-trained therapists working across six treatment rooms. It's here that you'll experience the true bliss of a Balinese massage. [www.kupubarongubud.com](http://www.kupubarongubud.com)

Left, from top: 24-carat gold mask facials are supposed to fight wrinkles and increase skin elasticity; Cocoon Medical Spa is located in a converted printing facility with high ceilings and frosted glass treatment rooms.