



# What? Wear no make-up when **George Clooney's** here? You must be joking!

**Mari Nicholson** puts her foot down at the stars' favourite spa in Dubai

**T**HE SPA DIRECTOR suggests I take a steam bath or sauna prior to my facial and massage and I stare at her in horror. No way! George Clooney is in the hotel and, if he comes into the spa, I have no intention of being seen with shiny red cheeks, hair in damp tendrils and no make-up. Matt Damon is also lurking around somewhere: both men are busy filming.

No problem, she says. The spa is strictly segregated, male on one side, female on the other, and I can pop into the hair stylist before leaving to have my crowning glory suitably tousled

again before flip-flopping around the swimming pool in the luxurious robe provided. The Ray-Bans will hide the fact that I'm wearing no mascara.

The new Shangri-La Hotel in Dubai is the place for celebrity spotting. This sprawling city, where all that glitters really is gold, attracts the rich and famous like bees to a honey pot. Film stars, models and sports personalities can be seen all over town, from the crowded lanes of the gold souks to the hotels that line the blindingly white Jumerah Beach (I swear they polish the sand every morning). City hotels such as the five-star Shangri-La have played host recently to Naomi

Campbell, Kate Moss, Enrique Iglesias, Anna Kournikova and Bryan Ferry, plus the boy band Blue and the now dis-banded girl band Mis-teeq.

Dubai's legendary status is built on the three Ss – sun, sand and shopping – to which can now be added a fourth, the Shangri-La Spa.

It's the perfect getaway for a few days, just five hours from the UK, no jabs needed, no malaria nor any other nasties – unless you want to count spitting camels – and no visa needed.

It's Disney World meets the Arabian Nights, from the Burj al Arab, decorated with five square miles of 22 carat gold leaf, with a fleet of white Rolls-Royces







Nowhere does bling like Dubai, but the Shangri-La's key word is discretion – which explains why the celebs love it so much

and an underwater restaurant, to The Palm, a man-made offshore island shaped like – you guessed it – a palm tree, with hotels, villas, penthouses, malls, entertainment facilities and 60km of man-made beaches. The villas and penthouses have already been sold, the rush to buy being led by David and Victoria Beckham.

This bling-tastic melting pot of outrageous luxury that stretches far out into the turquoise waters of the Arabian Gulf is now about to be joined by The World, another man-made group of islands laid out to resemble a map of the earth, and Hydropolis, an underwater hotel. And stand by for the desert's first indoor alpine resort with five ski-slopes and daily snow! Don't ask – just grab your salopettes.

Luxury in the Shangri-La Hotel is more understated. The Horizon Club rooms offer quiet elegance, discrete service and, of course, the spa, tempting me with its spectacular Chi Balancing treatment that apparently cures ailments I don't even know I have. These treatments

comprise a unique blend of Asian techniques, including acupressure, energising massage for yang stimulation and relaxing massage for yin, with pure oriental oils to harmonise the energy flow.

As strolling the souks of Dubai, where my plastic had become limp through overuse (designer goods at 30 per cent less than UK prices and jewel-coloured silks, beaded kaftans and pashminas at giveaway prices) was a bit like being in a sauna, I opt for a dip in one of three plunge pools in the spa suite and then a rest in the comfortable lounge before my treatment, personalised to suit my needs and focused on the five elements – water, earth, wood, metal and fire, a holistic approach to physical and spiritual well-being.

The treatment room is dim and, as I lie prone on the couch, senior spa therapist Aiyen strikes the Tibetan bowl and waves of sound begin to pour over me. As the last sweet note fades in the distance, she places the bowl on my upper back and strikes it again, and this





Spa areas are strictly segregated, so no chance of Matt and Kate bumping into each other in the steam bath. Spoilsports!



time the sound goes deeper into my body, the wave soothing and lifting me at the same time. Next, the bowl is placed in the middle of my back and I see snow-capped mountains, I see prayer-wheels, I see lush valleys and, as the sound fades away to a whisper, I accept that something extraordinary has happened.

Now I'm totally relaxed and Aiyen begins working her magic fingers to release the tensions, aligning the energy lines, balancing the chi and harmonising the yin and yang. She intuitively senses the tensions in my neck which come from too many hours at a desk and works to release them. She massages the calves of my legs until the tightness disappears, and she returns time and time again to massage my head until I'm putty in her hands.

And now the ultimate, the Biodroga Deep Cleansing facial using products developed especially for Shangri-La, sweet-smelling and luxurious.

I feel deeply relaxed and with such an inner glow that if George Clooney were to walk in right now I'd just raise a languid hand and say 'Hi'. Now that's relaxed!

Shangri-La was the legendary land where no one grew old. I feel years younger already, so maybe the Dubai Shangri-La is working the same miracle? Watch this pace.



Pictures: Flex, Big Pictures



## Stuff

Emirates flies daily from London Gatwick and Heathrow, Manchester and Glasgow to Dubai with fares from £388 plus £60 tax.

Package deals are available from major travel agents. Virgin offers three nights in Dubai from £719 including flights.

## Stuff

Direct booking with Shangri-La Hotel on [sldb@shangri-la.com](mailto:sldb@shangri-la.com). Room prices vary according to season but there are always packages available. Cheapest time to travel is during Ramadan (movable dates depending on the moon). Contact the hotel for prices.

### PRICES FOR MY TREATMENTS

#### Chi Balance Massage

(1hr 20mins)

Dhs 330

#### Biodroga Deep Cleansing Facial

(1hr 20mins)

Dhs 360

### MASSAGE & BODY TREATMENTS

#### Chi Balance Massage

(50mins) Dhs 220

#### Chi Body Scrub

(45 mins) Dhs 200

#### Biodroga Salt Scrub

(45mins) Dhs 220

#### Pure Body Toner Wrap

(1hr 20mins) Dhs 330

#### Biodroga Detox Body Envelopment

(1hr 20mins) Dhs 350

### FACIAL TREATMENTS

#### Purifying, Balance or Radiance facials

(50mins) Dhs 250

#### Inner Harmony facial

(1 hr 20 mins) Dhs 300

#### Biodroga facial for men

(50 mins) Dhs 330

#### Biodroga oxygen facial

(1hr 20mins)

Dhs 360

#### Futuresse caviar deluxe facial

(1hr 20mins) Dhs 400

### SPECIAL PACKAGES

#### Uplifting Journey

(includes Chi Body Scrub + Chi Balance

Massage, 1hr 20mins)

Dhs 380

#### Holistic Face & Body Experience

(includes

Chi Balance Massage +

Inner Harmony Facial,

2hrs 40mins) Dhs 570

Due to seasonal rates, prices and offerings may change