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Royal Style Thai massage

By Jon Fernquest

A formal "court massage" or Nuad rachasamnak is now available in addition to the more common nuad chaleisak, or folk massage.



The photo above shows the traditional Thai house that is the home of the Thai Traditional Medicine Health Promotion Centre which is part of the government agency the Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine (ITTM).

A majestic 'court massage' is now available to everybody

Having a massage is one of my favourite ways to relax. I normally have a traditional Thai or oil massage, but last week I experienced another kind of Thai massage which helped heal my back pain within an hour of service.

This type of massage is one of two styles of Thai massage available today, according to Dr Pramote Stienrut, Director of the Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine (ITTM).

It is called *nuad rachasamnak*, which literally means court massage. It sounded unfamiliar and rather grand to me.

My masseur, Kanchanawat, told me that this style of massage was formerly offered only to members of the royal family and nobles and is not yet widely offered in spas. She said when massaging a client, the masseur must use only their hands and fingers. When moving, the masseur must walk on their knees, she said.

"We must not use our knees, elbows nor feet for massaging our customers and must not stand over them as it is considered inappropriate," she said.

The client is required to lie on their back rather than on their stomach as in a typical Thai massage.

Normal Thai massage is called *nuad chaleisak*, or folk massage. It begins with massaging from feet to head, then massaging the back and the front. Some masseurs also end the service by twisting a customer's torso to the left and right.

"Court massage is very polite so we will not massage the head, only the legs, back and arms," Kanchanawat said, adding that it's a kind of medical treatment.

Before she started massaging me she asked if I had any health problems, to which I replied "No."

"No aches, no pain in any parts?," she continued.

I told her that I was fine and was here to try the treatment at the ITTM's Thai Traditional Medicine Health Promotion Centre as it was part of a one-day trip organised by the Tourism Authority of Thailand to let the members of the media experience Thainess.

She smiled and then said: "The style of the court massage will tell you which parts of your body have any trouble. You will know by the sharp shooting pain while I am massaging you."

Then she started massaging from my legs. Her fingers were strong and it felt as if she was using a tool. She has worked at the centre for more than a year after finishing a four-month intensive training course in traditional Thai massage.

She said every day the masseurs must be at the centre around 5:30am to attend a morning prayer session. Then they are required to exercise with "hermit body twists" known in Thai as *ruesi dad ton* before starting their working day at 8:30am.

Each masseur offers both court and folk massage, she said, but added that the court massage was more like a treatment rather than for relaxing.

This method focuses on the body's 10 major energy lines. A diagram of these key body lines is inscribed on the wall of Wat Po as well as displayed in the ITTM's museum.

It is believed that if a shooting pain occurs in any part of the body while massaging, it means an energy line is obstructed and pressing strong fingers along the invisible line can help clear the energy blockage and let it flow better.

Then she asked me to lie on my side and started massaging my lower back. An unexpected pain suddenly occurred. My face twisted.

"Now you know what I mean," she said and worked on the part of my back for a bit longer than other parts. After the one-hour course finished, I felt light and can now lie on both sides without feeling little pain. Amazing.

The Thai Traditional Medicine Health Promotion Centre also has a Thai Traditional Medicine Museum on the upper floor of the massage service centre. The museum houses seven galleries showing more than 300 types of herbs, traditional Thai medicines and displays on the theories and history of Thai massage, as well as herbs and spices used in Thai cuisine

Apart from offering traditional Thai massage, the centre also offers herbal steam bath, foot massage and a massage with *luk prakob*, or herbal hot compresses. Fees vary from 100-300 baht for a one-hour session.

The centre is open every day from 8.30am to 4.30pm. The location is in the Public Health Ministry on Tiwanon Road in Nonthaburi. Advance booking is required, call 02-590-2606 or visit the Thai-language website at <http://ittm.dtam.moph.go.th>