

Source: Chiang Mai News

## Thai traditional massage

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)**.

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

## Glossary:

**massage** - "the manipulation of superficial and deeper layers of muscle and connective tissue to enhance the function and promote relaxation and well-being" นวด

**traditional** - things (clothes, music, customs, etc.) that have been part of a country or society for a long time

**traditional Thai massage** - a type of massage involving pressure and stretching with origins in India.

**oil massage** - massage that uses fragrant oils

**Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine (ITTM)** - government agency to promote Thai traditional medicine created under the Department of Medical Services in 1993

**court** - connected with the place where the king, queen and the royal family live

**court massage** - massage as practiced in the palace with the royal family

**titbits** - little bits of food to eat (here: little experiences during travel)

**unfamiliar** - not have any knowledge or experience of something ซึ่งไม่คุ้นเคย

**grand** - very big ใหญ่โต

**masseur** - an person who practices and provides massage therapy หมอนวด

**spas** - a resort or beauty salon for relaxing personal care treatments

**client** - a customer or someone who receives services ลูกค้า

**inappropriate** - not appropriate, not acceptable

**twist** - to bend or turn in a circle with your hands บิด

**torso** - the upper part of the body, not including heads or arms ลำตัว

**medical treatment** - the process of providing medical care การรักษา

**media** - radio, television, newspaper, the Internet, considered as a group สื่อ

**experience** - the knowledge a person gets from actually being part of some event or activity ประสบการณ์

**Thainess** - what it means to be "Thai", one possible definition: "Firstly Thainess is the idea of a common collective identity which is based on the three common elements that is to say, Thai language, Buddhist religion, and Monarchy which all Thai people share. Secondly it is a concept that provides the foundations for social harmony and the respect of order in a patriarchal, hierarchical society where people display cool heads, warm hearts, gratitude and public deference. Thirdly, Thainess is this little something that makes Thai people who they are  
**sharp** - strong ที่รุนแรง

**shooting pain** - "a severe pain that starts in one place then quickly moves to another"  
**intensive** - involving a lot of effort, energy, or attention

**training** - to teach people how to do an activity or job การฝึกฝน

**session** - a formal meeting ประชุม

**energy lines** - ten lines that energy is located along in Thai massage, that provides the rationale behind Thai massage therapy เส้น

**key** - important คนสำคัญ

**inscribed** - engrave, record, write in stone or some other hard surface จารึก

**Wat Po** - the Buddhist temple that is the location of the most famous school of Thai massage in Thailand (See Wikipedia)

**museum** - a building where objects of historical, scientific or artistic interest are kept พิพิธภัณฑ์

**block** (verb) - prevent motion or flow along a path or passage ปิดทาง

**blockage** (noun) - something that prevents forward motion or flow along a path or passage, obstruction การปิดล้อม

**obstruct** - same as "block" above

**pressing** - very urgent and important ที่เร่งด่วน

**invisible** - unable to be seen มองไม่เห็น

**clear blockage** - remove the thing that prevents flow along a path or passage

**twisted** - bent into a shape that is not normal บิดเบี้ยว ผิดรูปผิดร่าง, distorted บิดเบือน

**galleries** - buildings where you can view paintings or other works of art

**steam bath** - bathing through exposure to steam, which makes a person sweat (perspire, perspiration)

**compress** - "a cloth or another material applied under pressure to an area of the skin and held in place for a period of time. A compress can be any temperature (cold, lukewarm, or hot) and it can be dry or wet. It may also be impregnated with medication or, in traditional medicine, an herbal remedy. Most compresses are used to relieve inflammation"