SOLO TRAVEL
The Joys of Travelling Solo
Japan’s Great Outdoors
Top Five Exotic Cruises

Honouring Mandela

Intoxicating Ethiopia

CHINA’S Tea Horse Road
Featured Contributors

KEPH SENETT
Keph Senett is a Canadian freelance writer whose passions for travel and soccer have led her to play the game on four continents. She specializes in stories about travel and sport; her writing has appeared in publications including Sports Illustrated online, the Globe and Mail and Curve Magazine. When not writing, she spends her free time trying to figure out how to qualify for a soccer squad in Asia, Australia, or Antarctica.

BARBARA RAMSAY ORR
Barbara Ramsay Orr is a freelance journalist, guide book author, iPhone app creator, former writing and art educator, amateur artist and ardent photographer. Her work has appeared in most major publications in Canada and many international outlets, including Chatelaine Magazine, Canadian Living, Golf Connoisseur, Readers Digest, NUVO, Associated Press, Christian Science Monitor, the Canadian Press, and the Globe and Mail. She is the proud recipient of two prestigious Lowell Thomas Awards for Excellence in Travel Journalism. She never travels without her sketchbook and watercolours – and a stash of tea.

MAI NGUYEN
Mai Nguyen is a freelance writer based in Toronto. She writes about travel, business, technology, finance and basically anything that interests her. Among her adventures, she has snorkelled with dolphins in Hawaii, climbed a mountain in Borneo, flipped a motorbike in Laos, and got massaged by a prisoner in Thailand. Her writing has appeared in Wired, Toronto Star, Globe and Mail and Reader’s Digest amongst others.

JOHANNA READ
Johanna Read is a Vancouver-based freelance writer and photographer specializing in travel, food and responsible tourism. She travels to four to six continents annually, and especially likes to encourage travel that is culturally, economically, and environmentally sustainable. She writes for publications like USA Today, Fodor’s and Canadian Traveller.
I stumble out of the spa, so relaxed I have trouble forming the words “aur kun ch’ran,” meaning “thank you very much” in Khmer. My brain has no idea whether I’ve been on the massage table for one hour or two. My muscles insist it must be five or six.

A massage anywhere in the world is a welcome thing, but especially so in Siem Reap, Cambodia, next door to the UNESCO-lauded Angkor temples. Visiting these ancient temples is incredible, but involves long days of walking through ruins and climbing up and down steep staircases with unnaturally high steps. My legs complain that I’ve tackled a few too many, and my neck protests that my camera is too heavy. A massage is the solution. I choose a traditional Cambodian herbal massage, not really knowing what is in store. I quickly realize I’ve chosen well. This massage is like no other I’ve had anywhere in the world.

After the therapist gives my back a deep tissue massage, she takes a muslin-bound bundle of aromatics from the steamer bubbling in the corner. I smell ginger and lemongrass. She touches the almost-scalding bundle to her hand, and then presses her now hot palm onto my back. The little tension I had left melts away. When the bundle has cooled enough, she then gives my back a third massage. This time, she stretches my muscles using the packet of herbs in long deep strokes. Returning the bundle to the steamer regularly, she blissfully repeats the triple massage on each of my arms and legs.

My jelly-like muscles get me back to my room for a deep sleep. They complain no more, not even when I take them up to Angkor Wat’s third tier the next day.

Two employees greet us at the entrance of the jimjilbang, a Korean bath. The woman leads me one way; the man leads my partner another. I find my locker, take a deep breath, and strip my clothes. Most jimjilbangs don’t allow bathing suits.

In the main room, there are natural baths of different temperatures. The hot bath has several women in it already. I gradually slide in as they watch me curiously. I immediately notice the walls; dark wood decorated with stones to create this traditional healing environment.

When I feel my skin begin to prun, I step out and approach a smaller room. An elderly woman, or ajumma, smiles at me. “First time?” she asks.

I nod awkwardly. She leads me to a table. I lie down as she opens a large sponge, which she uses to scrub the dead skin off my body. This is one reason Koreans come here so often. After doing this, your skin will be light and radiant.

It’s a bit painful, but as I see the strips of skin peeling off, I remember why I’m here. After 20 minutes, the ajumma ties my hair in a tight bun and sends me on my way, my skin now delightfully smooth.

I return to my locker to dress in cozy lounge clothes provided by the spa. My partner is waiting for me in his matching outfit, gesturing toward a hallway lined with different saunas. We even get to spend the night at the jimjilbang – which is common in Korean culture.

We pass the evening playing games, enjoying cold soup, and returning frequently to the baths. Sleeping soundly on heated floors in the sauna, it’s a common tradition in Korea that we are thankful to have tried.

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