

BACK DIAGNOSTIC MASSAGE, AROMA EXPERT FACIAL AND SOUND THERAPY

WHAT IS IT? This two-hour treatment package at Mayfair's Spa Illuminata combines massage with a luxurious facial tailored to suit your skin type, with an extra selling point — the therapist can pinpoint health troublespots. This is done through acupressure, a massage technique that originated in China. The final part of the session involves lying on a bed and listening to music through a pair of oversized headphones. But more of that later.

WHAT DOES IT CLAIM? To release toxins from the body, relieve tension and allow complete relaxation. Also rebalances skin by expelling excess sebum. Decleor essential oils, used in the aromatic facial, "decongest" the complexion as well as nourishing, soothing and — as in my case — lifting ageing skin. All the products are individually blended

FEELGOOD FACTOR

feelgoodfactor@standard.co.uk

Sophie Goodchild is given a most unusual health check accompanied by a massage and refreshing chill-out

and penetrate deep into your pores. **ANY SCIENCE TO IT?** The theory behind the 10-minute Back Diagnostic massage is that it releases toxins from problem areas, including the liver and lungs. The therapist uses acupressure along either side of the spine. If any of your organs — such as a sluggish liver — needs an MOT, then red marks show up on your body. Then the marks rapidly fade away.

Sound therapy is the latest treatment fad in the US. Trials show that sound waves can reduce nausea and fatigue by stimulating nerve endings in the body. The idea is that

you are plugged into headphones and "feel" the music through harmonic vibrations which travel up your body, relaxing your muscles and your brain. It's not as weird as it sounds.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? This was the Rolls-Royce of treatments with better relaxation value than a weekend away.

Spa Illuminata resembles a Greek temple (it's supposed to be a modern version of a Roman spa) with marble everywhere. The overall impression was of a very discreet, serene and private sanctuary.

Heaven, especially when it's dark and wet outside.

There was even a duvet on the massage couch, adding to the comfort factor. My French therapist Esther was impressive — friendly but not too familiar with a firm yet gentle technique.

It was hard not to drift off during the massage "diagnosis". I was a bit sceptical when she told me my problem points were my liver (I'm not much of a drinker) and my abdominal area. Esther explained that my groin issues — ahem — could be down to overactive hormones. Given I'm 37-ish and my biological clock is already deafening, then perhaps this makes sense.

With my extremely sensitive skin, I've always avoided scented products on my face. But the natural oils, including sandalwood and basil, were instantly soothing.

After cleansing, toning and exfoliating, Esther set to work removing all the impurities from my pores. This part was slightly

uncomfortable but also satisfying to know they were being thoroughly declogged.

The beauty session ended with a refreshing mask then I was whisked off to the sound therapy room and asked to lie on the special mattress which is plugged into a music system, so that I could feel the music.

Esther placed a pair of headphones on my ears, a mask over my eyes and I rapidly chilled out to the sound of classical music.

It was so relaxing that my hands felt as though they were floating away from my body. I was on a natural high afterwards and felt utterly rejuvenated.

And the treatment must have worked — a cab driver stopped to give me a free lift to the Tube.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE? £120 for the package of diagnostic massage, facial and sound therapy. Individual treatments start at £40. Spa Illuminata, 63 South Audley Street, W1, 020 7499 7777.