

GET RUBBED DOWN BY - COUNT 'EM - SIX HANDS AT ONCE ...

Shanghai life, for all the upsides, is not without its (often woefully large) share of frustrations. Thankfully, the city feels your pain – massage parlours can be found on seemingly every block, with armies of miracle foot-and-back workers ready to knead those China Days out of your system.

Yet in a city which necessitates weekly massages for sanity's sake, it can be easy to forget that there is more to the rubdown than those proffered by – bless 'em – Yide, Kangjun and Double Rainbow... or even blind man Wu and Happy Ending #23 (the latter for when you're are feeling fatigued and frisky).

For those that believe massages are more

about spoiling the soul than resuscitating the body, the Evian Spa's sensual three-masseuse massage may well be the holy grail.

The feeling of six hands simultaneously working your body is something everyone should experience at some point. As 30 fingers begin to caress, dig, massage and stroke your everyparts in unison – gliding on fragrant essential oils – panic seizes the mind: which sensation to focus on? When does pampering become excessive? Is there such a thing as too much physical pleasure?

But as the handiwork continues, consciousness hazily melts, daily minutiae dim, and the spirit succumbs to the deep recesses of relaxation. A triumph in tranquility.

Evian Royal Synchronized by Three Massage. RMB 1,600 (60 min). Evian Spa (2/F, Three on the Bund, 3 Zhongshan Dong Yi Lu, 6321 6622). Note: the Evian Spa is women only.

SCORE A CUSTOM-MADE OUTFIT FROM SHANGHAI'S TOP DESIGNERS ...

For the discerning fashionista, rummage trips through Shanghai boutiques often yield frustrated cries of, "There's nothing here!"

Agathe Colin, however, begs to differ. The mastermind behind Shanghai's first ever private fashion and design tour subscribes to the belief that those that truly dig will be rewarded. And so dug she has. The former model – she has since done stints at lingerie brands and fashion schools – is herself an impeccably dressed vision of vogue, and *Talk* recently commissioned a tour with the French fashionista to learn her secrets.

Colin took us down lane house alleys, up unassuming apartment complexes and into the homes of some of Shanghai's most promising new designers, most of whom only sell out of their studios and homes to those in the know. With Colin as our guide, *Talk* – despite sporting a bedraggled hoodie we've owned since age 18 – was warmly welcomed as a member Shanghai fashion's upper crust.

We sipped tea in the lane house studio of

full-time shoe designer, part-time art pusher Alison Yeung of Mary Ching – a Saint Martins grad who counts Yue Sai Kan, China's Oprah, among her fans. We visited the boho studio of La Vie's Jenny Ji – a promising young designer who's been namedropped by the likes of the New York Times – and drooled over racks upon racks of half-finished samples and beautiful fabrics. We laughed over lattes with the charming Laurence at Analk, a French lifestyle and accessories brand recently launched in China, trading stories about travel, design, and the eternal quest for the perfect handbag.

Colin's tour encourages the exchange of ideas and experiences between designers and visitors, and is a unique way to learn about the city's burgeoning fashion scene. It can also do wonders for your wardrobe, too. See something you like? The designers are mostly able to custom design pieces to flatter your fancies.

Style consulting from the city's best designers? Even Carrie Bradshaw ain't got it this good.

Agathe Colin, Luxury Concierge China. For full details on custom fashion, design and shopping tours, contact agathe@luxuryconciiergechina.com.

NAB THE BEST SEATS IN THE HOUSE ...

Scoring close-enough-to-see-the-sweat seats for a performance you've been dying to catch: there's no feeling like it. With more international acts coming to China now, there's a good chance that artists you actually want to see – no offense, Sarah Brightman – will be swinging through the PRC ere long. Who to call for the hook-ups? One word: Emma.

Emma is China's largest and most comprehensive ticketing agent – global giant Ticketmaster recently acquired a majority stake in the group – provides services for a host of music, sporting and arts events. From the Rolling Stones to the Tennis Open, the group has exclusive contracts with a sizeable roster of Chinese promoters and venues.

So how to get on their good side? Just ring them up. No, really. Emma has an e-newsletter to keep event fiends in the know about upcoming happenings. Yes, it's a sales tactic from them, but it's also a darn good way to make sure you don't miss anything. Spot something you like? Call Emma before the ticket release date, place an order for the number of VIP seats you want and, as soon as the tickets go on sale, they fulfill. Easy as pie... and there's no additional fee.

For those who remember the days of camping outside the ticket office, this may seem almost too easy. Robb Spitzer, director of live events marketing at Emma, explains, "Concert ticketing in China is still not as fierce as it is in more developed markets. In New York or Tokyo, for example, many people can't buy top price seats even if they want to because the shows sell out so quickly. But in China, if you pre-book, you have a good shot at great seats."

Though everyone has access to this service, Spitzer says, very few actually utilize it simply due to lack of awareness. [And for those who wanted to keep it a secret, we at *Talk* apologize.] Over time, as you purchase more VIP seats, the better your chances of always getting top spot: consistent customers, Spitzer hints, get first priority. For most shows in China, top-priced seats, according to Spitzer, hover around RMB 1500. Compared to price tags for star-fronted spectacles in the west, these can be incredible bargains.

Shanghai hotline: 6481 2938. Online: www.emma.cn.

SEE SHANGHAI EXACTLY HOW YOU WANT ...

Founders Jonathan Hasson and Spencer Doddington started Luxury Concierge China, a deluxe tour agency, to fill a gap the market for premium bespoke travel in China. Though the group offers roughly a dozen itineraries in its tour portfolio – from architecture to gastronomy – where LCC really excels is at quirky requests and tailor-made itineraries. From getting the inside scoop on China's contemporary art scene to getting behind the velvet rope at Shanghai's most VIP parties, LCC has the know-how – and the guanxi – to make it happen.

Recently, *Talk's* curiosity of our Shanghai surrounds got the better of us and we requested a French Concession and Bund history and architecture tour. Friends snickered that the request was too boring, too basic – little did they know. With Doddington as our guide, the day proved to be anything but.

An Old China Hand, the Texas native has resided in Shanghai for the past 12 years, and is probably the most knowledgeable resource on the city *Talk* has encountered in recent memory. With a MBA in finance, degrees in Asian history and architecture, and a seemingly encyclopedic memory for anything and everything China-related, Doddington can flow from Chinese religion to art, food to politics, all without missing a beat. Bonus: he speaks the local tongue and, we must say, frolicking around the city with a towering, Shanghainese-speaking laowai is a hoot, if only for the local's looks of bemused delight.

No question is too dumb for Doddington – and, trust us, we tested him – and all answers are, amazingly, given with authority and accuracy. *Talk* sneakily fact-checked him after our tour – sure enough, everything held up.

LCC welcomes requests from the weird to the wacky and is able to entertain most of them – for what they don't do, you'll have to get Doddington and Hasson off-the-record. Maybe we'll try to get a night with Zhang Ziyi – now that would be a luxe Chinese experience.

Luxury Concierge China. Tel: 135 0166 2908. Web: www.luxuryconciiergechina.com.

PAMPER YOURSELF WITH THE ULTIMATE LUXURY GETAWAY ...

It all sounded like a great idea. As one of six capitals of imperial China, Nanjing is rich with history. The itinerary was set: the Sun Yat-sen mausoleum, a hike up Zhongshan mountain, a pop-in at the Confucius Temple.

Two days later, as my better half and I boarded the train back to Shanghai, our heads hung in shame: not one item off our Nanjing tour checklist had been accomplished. We had failed miserably. But, then again, failing miserably had never felt so good.

In less than 48 hours, we had indulged in two spa treatments each, lingered over three long four-course meals – one

of which was a private candlelit dinner in our villa – spent hours cuddling up with our chosen dates for the weekend (David Mitchell and Siri Hustvedt), and bathed in a tub of rose petals – okay, fine, the latter was incredibly



cheesy. Physical activity was limited to what could be done in our impressive, king-sized, chiffon-flanked canopy bed – hey, luxury is sexy – and when the itinerary got too hectic – "do we take afternoon tea before or after the two-hour rubdown?" – a dip in our infinity pool seemed to help us find our bearings. ("Because, of course, happy hour is starting right after the spa. Duh.")

Indeed, Kayumanis Nanjing is the closest luxury destination to which Shanghai dwellers can flee. The Kayumanis Group of Indonesia operates four ultra-premium resorts in southeast Asia – the Nanjing property is its first in China, and there are plans for another in Guilin in the coming years.

Kayumanis – it means 'cinnamon' in Balinese – is in the business of pleasure, and the group is known for designing picture perfect havens of indulgence. Nanjing is no exception. The resort, nestled among hills upon hills of tea plantations, is a meditation on tranquility. Each villa – both one- and two-bedrooms are available – is enclosed inside its own compound, with a private



hot spring Jacuzzi and pool. Various décor themes – from Balinese to Japanese, Tibetan to Contemporary – see the sleek, spacious interiors decked out in traditional tapestries, indigenous art and assorted curios.

One complaint: the food at the Kayumanis Nanjing restaurant, Nine, is hit and miss; and it's unfortunate as, with Nanjing 45 minutes away, it really is your only option. The fusion menu from its Beijingese chef is basic hotel fare – a shame. Sub-par Cantonese muddles with decent Indonesian and run-of-the-mill Continental for a confused dining experience. It's not bad, not at all, but given the six-star standard in all other aspects of Kayumanis Nanjing, it disappointed. But, hey, you're not

there for the food anyway.

Take a weekend off and treat yourself. Your mind will thank you.

Kayumanis Nanjing, Sizhuang Village, Tangshan Town, Nanjing. Weekend in Style deluxe two-night packages include candlelight dinners, spa treatments and 24-hour butler service. Rates start at USD 970 net. For full details, call (025) 8410 7777 or visit www.kayumanis.com. Regular rates range from USD 599 to 799 a night. Other promotions and preferential rates are available through Luxury Concierge China – details through www.luxuryconciiergechina.com.