

Exploring Vancouver

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Passport

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Is Vancouver the best city in the world? A lot of people seem to think so. In 2005 it was voted the most livable city in the world by a think tank survey. It's also a *Conde Nast Traveler* Reader's Choice for top city to visit in the Americas, and the International Olympic Committee chose it to host the Olympics in 2010. So what makes Vancouver so "livable," and if it's so great, why aren't I living there? This past June I went there to find out.

Nothing beats the stress of travel like a spa visit, and first on my list was **Skoah**, a day spa that does one thing only, but does it well: facials. I was convinced to give it a try when even a therapist at a competing spa in town recommended the Skoah facial. My own face felt squeaky clean and smooth after my appointment, and I picked up a few items from their impressive signature skincare line before I left.

Another great spa is the **Absolute Spa at Hotel Vancouver**, one of the few spas in North America that caters primarily to gentlemen. The large, private treatment rooms feature dim lights, oversize soaking tubs, and spacious high-tech showers. The lobby walls here are filled with headshots of celebrities who have ducked in for a quick refresh.

I also booked an appointment at **Miraj**, Canada's only Middle-Eastern *hammam*. It's located on the ground floor of a nondescript residential building in the prestigious South Granville area, so I was surprised to pass through the glass doors into a Turkish oasis of arched doorways, Moorish columns, and Moroccan silk pillows. After a quick shower I warmed up in a spacious and private marble hammam (steam room) before being led to a low-mist antechamber by my therapist for a total body *gommage* (exfoliating scrub) with Moroccan soap. I was naked as a jay bird, but so relaxed. My therapist must have scrubbed away any modesty I had left. Then she passed me off to my final therapist who gave me a fantastic massage using traditional scented oils before dropping me in the sultana lounge with a cup of hot tea and a delicious Lebanese sweet cake. I collapsed on the velvet bed for almost an hour, reading magazines and gazing out the arched window at the rush of traffic outside. With only an inch of glass separating me from the throng of humanity, it felt a world away.