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From Times Online

September 10, 2008

## Chinalife, Camden, London

**White coated therapists administer herbal facials and acupuncture at this spa behind a tea-shop**

IMAGE :1 of 5

Ginny McGrath

**USP** China Life is an unusual spa – it's in Camden, one of London's quirkiest districts, many of its therapists are doctors trained in Chinese medicine, acupuncture is a speciality, and the premises includes a tea bar and tea shop. It's been open since spring 2007, has a second outlet in Bath and its sister company, Acu Medic, has a Chinese medicine shop next door.

**AMBIENCE** It's worth arriving a few minutes early for your treatment, or staying for a few minutes at the end to browse the tea bar and shop at the front. The elegant décor is inspired by 1920s Shanghai and it's a mesmerising sight looking through the floor to ceiling glass at the tea apothecaries creating potions from the wall of wooden drawers filled with tea leaves. There are a few massage chairs behind curtains in this entrance but the remaining treatment rooms are through a door at the back.

Here, the pretty décor gives way to a more clinical look that's aligned with the spa's principles – a treatment here is more remedial than indulgent. Walls are white, the therapists wear white chemist's coats and spa accoutrements like smelly candles and whale music are notable by their absence.

**EXPERIENCE** My Chinese doctor/therapist Kei, got straight to the point, asking me questions like whether I was stressed, had I been sleeping well and for how long had I had wrinkles, which was news to me at a relatively spritely 30. Forget idle chit-chat about your summer holiday – she wanted to know about my lifestyle and see my tongue – after which she (correctly) diagnosed poor circulation.



### Top 5 London day spas

We've hand-picked five of the capital's best day spas for part-time pampering

I was booked in for a herbal facial but Wei suggested some cosmetic acupuncture after she gave me a scrub and mask to help clear my skin. The products smelt delicious and contain various Chinese herbs that boast qualities from hydration to nourishment for the skin.

I was nervous about the acupuncture having not had it

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5 spas for city pep-ups

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I wouldn't say I was converted on my first go, but as Wei said, you need a few treatments to see the benefits.

Afterwards my face was smooth – no red blotches that you get after some facials, and that evening a friend commented on my glowing skin.

I then had a Thai therapy massage with a Portuguese therapist called Mali. He was a huge hulking man who used his strength carefully to manipulate my body in a clothed massage on a mat on the floor – just like the massage you get off the street in Thailand. He also used a delicious-smelling herbal compress that he said had healing properties and would warm my muscles.

It was nerve-wracking hearing my neck and back quietly click, but I felt great at the end – as if I'd done a session of yoga – stretched and invigorated.

**FOOD** Treatments are followed up with a free cup of tea at the tea bar and a homemade yam cookie. Tea blends include cleansing, mind focus, digestive and calming varieties, plus there are tea cocktails (sans alcohol), tea lattes, and tonic shots. Some tasted awful, but others divine – I'd suggest a taster before you commit to a full cup.

**IN CROWD** A mix of eclectic Camden types of all ages, all with an appreciation of alternative healing.

**WALLET WATCH** The Herbal Facial with cosmetic acupuncture costs £79 for 80 minutes and the Thai Therapy full-body massage costs £1 a minute for 10, 20 or 40 minutes, £55 for 60 minutes and £80 for 90 minutes. There's also a 30-minute facial for £20, foot therapy for £25 for 25 minutes and various lifestyle packages focussed on slimming, energising and knot release. If you book five treatments you get a sixth free.

**NEED TO KNOW** Chinalife, 101-105 Camden High Street, London, NW1 7JN (020 7388 6704; [www.chinalifeweb.com](http://www.chinalifeweb.com))

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