

# SUNDAY PEOPLE

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## Just breathe in the antioxidants

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Somewhere in a spa in Petaling Jaya, customers get all hot and sweaty as they bake in temperatures of 42° Celsius but they don't smell. CHAI MEI LING finds out why.

FORGET the idea of a swanky aroma-infused beauty spa, where masseurs with deft fingers work to unknot those achy joints. All you do in Ecoparadise, tucked away in Sunway Mas, Petaling Jaya, is sweat it out. Garbed in yukatas (Japanese robes), customers lie down in a room heated up to 42° Celsius, with a low humidity of 40 per cent for 40 minutes. It's stifling at first but you get used to it easily. Some regulars drop off to sleep as they bake away.

Heat, though, definitely isn't what draws over 150 people to the spa each day. Instead, they come to breathe in the air, or more specifically, antioxidant particles in the air. These enzymes curb cell damage by reducing the formation of free radicals.

Pollution, tobacco smoke, stressful lifestyles and unhealthy diets aggravate the natural tendency to form free radicals. It is widely held that by neutralising these free radicals and repairing damaged cells, antioxidants can boost the immune system, prevent disease and slow down the ageing process.

Common antioxidants include vitamins A, C and E, beta-carotene and lycopene, found in brightly-coloured fruit and vegetables. However, with today's use of pesticides and fertilisers, combined with inadequate diets, our intake of antioxidants might be insufficient.

Ecoparadise spa is constructed using materials infused with antioxidant solutions. Antioxidants are embedded in the tiles, bricks, wooden planks, PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastics and paint which now ooze antioxidants back into the air.

All this means there is not even a whiff of body odour amongst the sweat-drenched spa customers. With every intake of breath, antioxidants flow into the body, removing toxins in the process. That's the concept behind the Ecoparadise spa. Its executive chairman Augustine Koh says: "We don't do anything more than improve your immunity and resistance to oxidative stress and disease." That, it seems, is quite enough for the clientele who include a toddler, septuagenarians, a pregnant mother, the beauty conscious, high-ranking government officials and the lower-income group. They come for reasons that vary from wanting a flawless complexion and reducing stomach bloating to more serious cases of chronic eczema, lupus and cancer.

Some, like retired headmistress Joni Chan, just want to maintain what they have. She teaches line dancing four hours a day and attends dancing classes herself three times a week.

After a friend dragged a reluctant Chan to Ecoparadise for a trial, she didn't need any more convincing. She feels good and more energetic now. "I was already doing a lot of exercise. I could have said I don't need this, but I'm glad I didn't." One just doesn't feel good – one looks good too. "Friends are asking me what new cosmetics I'm using." A glowing complexion is the first sign that the therapy is working, says Chiam Soon Hock, 59. Friends are complimenting him on his ruddy cheeks and younger appearance. "One thought I had plastic surgery. Another thought I had Botox injections. But all I'm glad for is that I'm doing fine," says Chiam, a former colon cancer patient. "It really improved my well-being. I'm not sleepy, I'm fresh and alert." Jasmine, 51, has made the spa her haunt since she was diagnosed with third stage breast cancer about six months ago. In her search for a more holistic treatment, she gave Ecoparadise a try. She goes there regularly now because she is "eating and sleeping better".

"When I first came here, I was very sad," she recalls. "Still, I came every day and I met other customers, who gave me the confidence to fight on."

We are actually living in a very stressful environment that's full of chemicals, says Koh. Indoors, he says, can be up to 100 times more polluted than outdoors because of chemicals such as formaldehyde and benzenes found in paint and timber. The paint used in Ecoparadise can reduce the level of formaldehyde in the air up to 10 times less than the permissible level set by Japan's Department of Environment.

So what works better – breathing in antioxidants or popping antioxidant pills sold in pharmacies? “Research shows that antioxidant consumption capacity is just three to four per cent,” says Koh. “But we breathe in 2,600 gallons of air a day – imagine the amount of antioxidants that can be absorbed into the body.”

### **Partnership built on a sniff**

**“GO on, smell my shoes,” a Japanese businessman told Augustine Koh a couple of years ago in Tokyo. An unusual request definitely but smell the shoes Koh did and to his surprise, the insoles had no odour at all.**

**And so a partnership was born and today, these insoles are sold at Ecoparadise. Koh became interested in antioxidant therapy after he tried it three times and coming out feeling good.**

**Ecoparadise is more than just a spa, says Koh, the former director of environment for the Asian Productivity Organisation, based in Japan. Conceived as one of the practical solutions to environmental problems, its concept is to green the world, and to make the world a better and more productive place.**

**Koh says: “We believe that in running a business, you maximise your profits, but you should make sure the negative effects do not spill over to the environment or affect the community.”**

**Ecoparadise runs on electricity costs of below RM1,000 per month, and pays the minimum amount for water. Its walls are coated with an antioxidant paint that acts as a dehumidifier, so the need to run air conditioners is greatly reduced. Similarly, well-insulated rooms prevent heat from escaping.**

**The spa is doing its part to make the therapy as affordable as possible for everyone at a maximum rate of RM35 per session. It also employs customers.**

**“These people cannot find jobs because of their conditions. We are giving them an opportunity to recover and to work here,” says Koh.**

**Ecoparadise also sells antioxidant fertiliser, plastic bag, bucket, soap, water filter, ankle guard and mattress pad. A second Ecoparadise branch has just opened in Frasers Business Park, Sungei Besi.**

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