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ALGOTHERAPY: Secrets from the Sea

BY: DENISE REYNOLDS

Seaweed wraps aren't just for sushi anymore. Loaded with vitamins, minerals, and protein, seaweed wraps are showing up on menus of a different type—spa services menus. Beautiful people have flocked to the sea for centuries, soaking up its restorative powers. Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, who was born from the foam of the sea, owed her supple skin, shiny hair, and sparkling eyes to the oceanic climate that surrounded her—an underwater treasure chest brimming with nature's oldest beauty secrets.

Algotherapy is the use of seaweed or seaweed extracts in health and beauty treatments. According to the Smithsonian, algae have been around for 3 billion years. Capturing all the richness of the sea, algae that live beneath its surface are commonly known as seaweed. Touted for everything from reducing wrinkles and cellulite to relieving arthritis pain and stiffness, algotherapy treatments are gaining popularity. Often found at destination spas near seaweed-rich waters, algotherapy treatments may actually dissolve a plethora of problems.

Nestled among majestic mountains in the ruggedly beautiful Connemara region of Ireland's west coast, Delphi Mountain Resort & Spa delivers fresh seaweed baths via room service. Harvested from the local shoreline, a container of *Fucus serratus* seaweed arrives in a water-filled bucket, along with a lavender candle and silky body balm. Pour it into a tub of warm water, and drown your cares in an exotic mineral cocktail as you absorb stress-busting magnesium, fat-burning iodine, metabolism-boosting potassium, skin-enhancing zinc, and inflammation-lowering selenium. Not as slimy as you might suspect, its greenish-brown leaves are almost velvety in texture and sport the briny smell of seawater.

Thirty minutes after I emerged from Delphi's watery sea garden, my skin exhibited improved firmness and elasticity, thanks to seaweed-imparted vitamins that increase cellular collagen density and moisture-retaining properties bestowed by seaweed's mineral salts. Delphi's spa also offers Ocean Wraps with seaweed and Ocean Baths with seawater—choose from detox or muscle relaxing—along with a Marine Algae Body Wrap, and an Enzymatic Sea Mud Wrap, all excellent

algotherapy options.

Further south, the Park Hotel Kenmare provides spa-goers with a smashing juxtaposition of old and new. Reserved exclusively for the guests of this genteel 19th century country manor house, SÁMAS is a trendsetting destination spa that merits a trip across the Atlantic. Stunning in its simplicity, the spa takes its name from an ancient Gaelic word meaning “indulgence of the senses.” You'll think you've gone back to the future; this spa is worthy of a design award from the Museum of Modern Art. Algotherapy treatments here include an Energy Booster Body Wrap with Marine Algae and a Hot Stone Massage & Body Wrap utilizing algae extracts. Add an Irish Sea Salt & Oil Scrub for an extra Celtic touch.

I opted for a Detoxifying Algae Treatment, which began with an age-old Irish foot ritual. My feet were treated to a mineral salt soak, massaged with restorative oil, and then individually enveloped in warm towels. Using *Laminaria digitata* seaweed harvested from Kerry's shoreline, my therapist performed a full-body dry brush exfoliation to increase circulation and enhance the absorption of the seaweed product. As I relaxed on the heated massage table, she delicately swaddled me in pastel-colored material that helped my body sweat out its toxins. The minerals in seaweed break open the chemical bonds that seal toxins in our cells, allowing trapped toxins and wastes to be naturally absorbed into the lymph system and subsequently eliminated from the body. Blissfully unaware of the science behind the seaweed, I drifted off to sleep as she softly massaged my scalp for twenty minutes while my seaweed-wrapped body baked beneath a warm blanket.

Gradually regaining my consciousness, I asked my therapist, “What color is this algae: Red, brown, green, or blue?” “Green,” she replied with a softly lilting laughter. But of course! What other color would Irish algae be?

Spa specialist Denise Reynolds, whose column “Spa Pleasures” brings you reports on spa treatments from around the world, invites you to visit www.spapleasures.com for more information on the pleasures that await you at today's spas. Copyright © 2004