

Gathering steam in Sapa

After a long day of hiking the steep hills and terraced rice paddies of the mountains around Sapa, an all-natural herbal steam bath was just what my aching muscles needed.

At Red Dao Spa, I was led into a small bath full of fragrant steam wafting from the large wooden tub. First, I washed down with some herb-infused water, a dark reddish color, and then sat in the warm water for a 20 minute soak.

Try the true Dao's spa at:

Red Dao Spa: Ta Chai Village, Ta Phin Commune, Sapa District, Lao Cai Province

Tour and [hotels in Sapa](#) can be booked at:

TUN TRAVEL VIETNAM

48 Ngo Sy Lien, Dong Da, Hanoi

The Red Dao people in Sapa are known as the best herbalists in the area thanks to a vibrant medicinal culture centered on herbal remedies. Living near thick forests, Red Dao communities have taken advantage of the rich source of medicine to keep them healthy and full of energy. The Red Dao use herbs to treat everything from flu to skin diseases and muscle problems.

For generations, the Red Dao people have used traditional herbal spas to treat a variety of ailments. Their baths include ten different kinds of herbs collected fresh from the forest before each soak. The leaves, some fresh but some dried, are boiled for 3-4 hours. Then they are mixed with fresh water at 30°C - 37°C. The bathtub, put in a small room to keep the steam and fragrance of the herbs, is usually made from fir or another aromatic wood.

Therapy

Red Dao Spa is run by Sapa local Ly Lao Lo in Ta Chai Village, Ta Phin Commune, around 12 kilometers from the center of the town. The spa is small and sparsely furnished, but welcoming and comfortable. I visited after a Sapa woman suggested the place. A local girl collects herbs for the Red Dao Spa. The spa's baths include ten different kinds of herbs collected fresh from the forest before each soak. Once I arrived, I was briefed about the history of the herbal therapies I would be given and the properties of each herb.

Then I had my soak. Sitting in the warm, red water, I felt all my senses tingle and my muscles eased and relaxed. A soothing feeling crept up and down my body. After 20 minutes, I was thoroughly relaxed.

Goldmine

The only problem with Sapa's new Red Dao-style spas is that there are a lot of them and it's not easy to tell which ones are authentic. "The thing that worries me is if people sell the service when they don't really understand it and do not use the herbs properly," said Lo.

"It also saddens me to see villagers working very hard to collect the herbs when the spas don't pay them very well."

With help from doctors at the Hanoi University of Pharmacy, Lo has also established a small company producing soap with traditional Red Dao herbs and leaves. To

make the product, which can be found in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Lo has hired some 40 families in his village to grow the herbs themselves.

Source: [Get Vietnam Visa](#)