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Photos courtesy of Olympus Spa

The offerings at Olympus Spa lend to a mini-vacation in Lynnwood.



The Korean Touch

Western Washington embraces Seoul-soothing spa traditions

by Lora Shinn

Western Washington's first Korean day spa opened in 1997 in Lakewood, and, as word of its luxurious Roman bath-like atmosphere and re-energizing properties spread, residents and visitors clamored for more. Since then, a half-dozen more Korean spas have popped up along the I-5 corridor, from Vancouver, B.C., to Portland, Ore. Most offer similar styles of services and accommodations, with a few quirky variations. Here are my two favorites:

The 7,000-square-foot, women-only [Olympus Spa](#) in Lynnwood—the newer, larger version of the Lakewood Olympus Spa that started the trend—is like a vacation from daily life. Upon walking in, you are greeted by the exotic scents of mugwort-infused steam rooms, green tea shampoo and roasted barley tea. A typical Saturday is a U.N. of spa-goers: English, Russian, Ethiopian, Vietnamese, and, of course, Korean.

The spa provides simple robes and hair caps for the facility. (A \$35 entry pass provides access to the pools, “energy rooms,” saunas and steam rooms; body and beauty treatments are available for additional fees.) In the hydrotherapy area, bathers are required to be nude—slightly uncomfortable at first, but easy to overcome once you realize that bareness is a great equalizer. An overhead skylight illuminates hot-tub sized pools of varying temps, including a 60-degree waterfall plunge and a 104-degree dip.

Rinse with amber water drawn from the mugwort well, then head for the steam sauna or dry sauna. After pondering your pores, you may decide to go for a Korean scrub treatment. A vigorous, rough-gloved 40-minute scour reveals skin soft enough to make a baby jealous.

Post-soak, robe up and investigate the building. Tuck into Korean food (the protein-rich bibimbap—rice mixed with vegetables and meat in a hot stone pot—fortifies); pour a \$5 free-refill cup of green tea; or lounge on a couch, novel in hand. But don't stop exploring until you find the spa's treasure: eight energy rooms ranging from 60 degrees to a bone-roasting 170 degrees.

In the heated energy rooms, surfaces emit far-infrared (FIR) heat, and the walls glitter with minerals, plants and stones. Like the sun's rays, FIR warms people with thermal energy, thereby mimicking a hot summer day (without the worries about sun damage).

In the cave-like 170-degree Mud and Jade Room, the walls and ceiling sparkle with jade, rose quartz, aventurine and

aquamarine. In the 150-degree Sand Room, spa-goers listen to soothing ocean sounds, while cradled by cloth-covered waves of heated sand.

In South Korea, similar spas, or *jjimjilbangs*, offer a “home away from home” for families to relax and socialize, providing hydrotherapy and mineral rooms, and areas for playing games, watching TV, lounging and even sleeping. In Federal Way, the 3-story [Palace Spa](#) embraces this concept, welcoming men, women and even children over age 6. Separate male and female bathing facilities (each with three simple pools), massage and scrub facilities reassure modest spa-goers. In the co-ed areas, the functional unisex shorts-and-tee set (provided by the spa) reinforces the idea that everyone is here to unwind, not impress.

On the ground floor, petite gem-inlaid saunas welcome visitors. If you’re daring, use a heated salt brick as a pillow, as other spa-goers do, or just chill out in the common area. On a recent visit, televisions facing overstuffed chairs broadcast a Korean American Idol–type competition and a local football game.

A small gym, a restaurant serving traditional Korean snacks and a lounge are located on the top floor. On my visit, I saw children playing board games, a man reading e-mails on the spa computer and a grandfather snoring in one of the massage chairs.

A home away from home, indeed.

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