

Some like it hot

WHEN IT COMES TO WATER, WE'RE A NATION THAT THINKS BEACH, NOT BATHING. BUT MAYBE IT'S TIME TO IMMERSE YOURSELF IN HOT SPRINGS — YOUR BODY WILL LOVE YOU, SAYS SALLY HUNWICK

Hear "hot springs" and you probably think of New Zealand, Japan or Turkey — not Australia, where the geological conditions make thermal water harder to come by. In fact, you can find hot springs in every Australian state and now, with the relaunch of Peninsula Hot Springs on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, we may all be just a little more eager to take a dip locally.

Peninsula first opened in 2005 with six outdoor baths, but a recent upgrade means it now boasts 39 bathing "experiences" and is Australia's largest, and only naturally occurring, hot springs centre to combine the health benefits of thermal mineral water with a full menu of spa treatments. And, phew, a hefty dose of luxury.

In addition to the Japanese-style hot pools dotted among native tea-trees, there are reflexology footbaths, hammams (Turkish steam rooms), an icy Russian-style plunge pool and a Swedish-inspired sauna overlooking a feng shui waterfall.

If you're planning a visit to the day spa, you should also book one of the intimate pools in the spa dreaming centre: they're ideal for unwinding pre- or post-treatment. Otherwise, book one of the spa's private indoor or outdoor bathing areas, or if you're into zoning out with friends, head to the secluded Arabic marquee, which accommodates up to eight people.

The founder and co-director of Peninsula Hot Springs, Charles Davidson, became a bathing convert in 1992 after



Peninsula Hot Springs, Victoria.

DECADENT DIP DESTINATIONS

Peninsula Hot Springs, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, www.peninsulahotsprings.com

Korean Ginseng Bathhouse, Sydney: A Korean-style bathing house with ginseng baths and intense body scrubs. Ideal for urbanites.

www.bodyinc.com.au

Hepburn Bathhouse & Spa, Daylesford, Victoria: European-style bathing with heated indoor mineral pools, steam rooms and a top spa. www.hepburnbathhouse.com

PREPARED TO ROUGH IT? TRY...

Moree Hot Artesian Pool Complex, New South Wales, www.moreensw.com

Innot Hot Springs, North Queensland, www.innohotspringspark.com

Mataranka Hot Springs, Eley National Park, Northern Territory, www.nt.gov.au

Douglas Hot Springs, Douglas River, Northern Territory, www.nt.gov.au

Zebedee Thermal Springs, at El Questro in the Kimberley, Western Australia, www.elquestro.com.au

Hastings Caves and Thermal Springs, southern Tasmania, (03) 6298 3209

soaking in the snow-lined thermal baths of Kusatsu in Japan, a hot spring he still rates as among the best in the world. Not that we should be intimidated, he says.

"Australia has some springs [that are] just as spectacular." His key picks are the thermal springs in Tasmania and the Kooma indigenous community's Murra Murra pools in southern Queensland,

but if you like your creature comforts, heed this warning: "There are no toilets, showers, accommodation, massages or any of those other spa-related activities."

"Rough" is not a word that features in Peninsula's vocabulary. The waters that gurgle up here from 637 metres below the surface are a cocktail of sulphur, calcium, magnesium and potassium, which makes soaking in them akin to dunking your body in a tub of La Mer.

The potential skin benefits include wound healing, fading of scar tissue and fighting off skin disease — and at the very least you'll dry off with smoother, more radiant skin.

The body benefits stack up, too. These do-good waters are said to relieve tight muscles, speed up post-operative rehabilitation, fight bronchial problems, lower blood pressure and soothe arthritis. What's more, the heat — which ranges between 37 and 43 degrees Celsius — "releases toxins in the system and boosts blood flow," says Davidson.

"The art of bathing has been around as long as warm waters have flowed to the surface from deep underground," he says. "It gives people a chance to breathe the fresh air, sit under the trees and feel part of the environment."

Now what spa bath could possibly ever do that? ■