

The Asian Reporter

Pacific Northwest News □ Volume 25 Number 3 □ February 2, 2015 □ www.asianreporter.com



It's a hoot hanging out with owls at Tokyo café

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Meet Coco: Potentially China's next Li Na

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Miami Marlins finalize deal with Ichiro

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Snails slither into spa scene in Thailand and around world



GRACEFUL GASTROPODS. A customer receives a beauty treatment with snails at a snail farm in Chiang Mai province, in northern Thailand. That the latest addition to the global beauty and wellness craze — snail facials — should surface in the hills of northern Thailand is only natural. The Southeast Asian country ranks among the world's top spa destinations, with massage treatments of every description offered around just about every corner. (AP Photo/Denis Gray)

By Denis D. Gray
The Associated Press

CHIANG MAI, Thailand — The last time I encountered escargots they were served up by a French waiter, sizzling in garlic and herb butter. Now, one is slithering up the bridge of my nose while five others are being stuck onto other parts of my face by a Thai beautician, all secreting snail slime to hopefully smooth out some wrinkles and otherwise give me a younger-than-my-age look.

That this latest addition to the global beauty and wellness craze — snail facials

— should surface in the hills of northern Thailand is only natural. The Southeast Asian country ranks among the world's top spa destinations, with massage treatments of every description offered around just about every corner. Other members of the animal kingdom are also enlisted, including fish at some 4,000 pedicure spas.

Merely another marketing ploy or an effective way to plump up skin in need of repair or rejuvenation? Expert opinions differ. The two young Thai women reclining next to me at Chiang Mai's Snail Spa sang the praises of *helix aspera muller glycoconjugates*, snail mucus for short.

And when I returned home, my wife described my face as “different,” but declined to go into detail.

Appropriately, given the French passion for these gastropods, the spa was started last year by two Frenchmen who had imported 100 of them from home. The colony now boasts more than 30,000, munching on chemically free carrots, cabbage, and aloe on a certified organic farm.

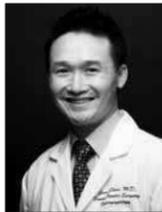
“We take care of the snails as if they were our family, our babies. You can see they look very good,” says Luc Champeyroux,

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