

The Salt Lake Tribune DISCOVER



Inside

World of Wonder D2
Harriette Cole D3
Comics D6-8
Television D8

WWW.SLTRIB.COM



PHOTOS BY RYAN GALBRAITH/The Salt Lake Tribune

Jennifer Ericksen relaxes in an *ofuro*, or Japanese bath, complete with bath elixirs, at the Kura Door Holistic Japanese Spa in the Avenues neighborhood.



Isis Kirby prepares a tea service before customers begin their treatments. The spa also offers massage therapy, facials, body wraps, yoga, tai chi and more.

Whole leaf Japanese green tea and other herbal teas are available at the Kura Door Holistic Japanese Spa.

the Art of relaxation

Japanese spa aims to replenish body and soul

BY CAREY HAMILTON
The Salt Lake Tribune

Walking in to the Kura Door Holistic Japanese Spa is like stepping into Japan.

Japanese lanterns light the hallways, Japanese-themed artwork adorns the walls and antique Japanese furniture is peppered throughout the building. A Japanese garden grows in a small outdoor courtyard, and spa-goers can sit on mats in a traditional tea room.

In mid-October, Ali and Mark Kulmer opened the spa in Salt Lake City's Avenues neighborhood to offer a unique blend of Japanese baths, massage therapy, facials, body wraps, yoga, tai chi and meditation classes.

"We've tried to create a very restful, meditative environment for people to enjoy," Ali said. "People are hungry for something outside the Western approach to medicine and health."

In travels to Japan, Ali, 29, and Mark, 30, were drawn to the concept of focusing on healing and rejuvenating mind, body and spirit. The couple first dreamed of building the spa in Summit County but ran into problems with rezoning. Their search brought them to the former dwelling of the now defunct Avenues Wellness Center, an art gallery and spa.

After convincing banks and investors their concept would work and renovating the building, they unveiled the first Japanese spa in Utah.

Relatively rare compared to tradi-
See **JAPANESE SPA**, D2



Japanese spa focuses on relaxation, healing

● Continued from D1

tional day spas, Japanese spas are found mostly in California, New Mexico and the Northwest. One of the most well-known is Ten Thousand Waves in Santa Fe, N.M., which bills itself as the closest thing to an *onsen* — the Japanese term for a hot spring — outside of Japan.

Before customers at the Kura Door start their treatments, they can relax in a cotton kimono, sip tea or lounge in the sauna or eucalyptus steam room.

The *ofuro*, the Japanese bath, is a tradition in Japan and at the heart of Kura Door. The practice of the baths dates back thousands of years and remains a place for people to reflect and get away from the stresses of life.

Before you enter the tub in a private room, you shower to rinse off all the dirt and tension of the day. You can either wash yourself or an attendant will scrub your back for you. For those wanting more romance, a two-person tub is available.

The wood and stainless steel baths are square and deep so the bather is

submerged to their neck and sits rather than reclines.

To soothe and replenish the body and soul, an attendant will sprinkle rose petals in the water and offer you the choice of five healing salts: sage, grand forest, warming ginger, geisha's milk bath and chamomile.

People have reported feeling light-headed after getting out of the tub because of its relaxing nature. Its cost? \$40.

For those who want more pampering, the spa has a variety of massages, body wraps and facials.

Nine massages are available, ranging from styles that integrate the popular Swedish massage to others with a more Eastern flavor. For example, the

Japanese stone massage involves rubbing smooth basalt stones soaked in oils onto the body in long, flowing strokes. Warmed or cooled stones can be alternated to relieve tension and restore balance.

The facial treatments were patterned after the Arcona Studio in Los Angeles. The founder, Arcona Devan, was a pioneer in holistic therapies and created a line of skin care products used by some of Hollywood's biggest celebrities. The full Arcona rejuvenation deluxe facial costs \$125.

From the skin products they use to the construction materials, the Kulers strived to make everything about Kura Door natural and organic. Architecturally, some of the floors are made

of bamboo and the stairs are covered with sea grass.

The name of the spa is based on Japanese history. During the Edo Period, people stored their valuables in small shed-like buildings in their yards to avoid paying taxes on them. Mark said the name fits well because he considers his clients and employees his treasures. It also is literal: the large, wood front door is an antique from Japan.

The two painstakingly decorated the spa and crafted the concept.

"We shouldn't be mistaken for a 'granola' approach," Ali said. "We're savvy, therapy oriented and based on the traditional Japanese approach to wellness and beauty."

chamilton@sltrib.com