

Thai massage on the floor, not on a massage table

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There are important reasons for practicing Thai massage on a mat on the floor, and not on a table. Working in the traditional way, on the floor, we fully honor Thai massage as a powerful, comprehensive, versatile, and all-encompassing healing art that helps our clients, while also caring for our own bodies. Authentic Thai massage represents a radically different approach to western massage and bodywork. I believe it should not be practiced simply as a series of stretches incorporated into a table massage.

Respect for the tradition and for our Thai teachers

All of the Thai massage instructors and practitioners I have met in Thailand practice only on a floor mat. That is enough reason for me, right there. Speaking for people from the United States, our reputation around the world could be improved by showing humility and genuine respect for the Thai culture and its ancient healing traditions. We would be wise to humbly remain in “beginner’s mind” for many years of study and practice before we make claims such as “Blending East and West.” Besides, Thailand has been blending East and West for thousands of years already. Strategically located on the Silk Road, Thailand has participated for centuries in a continual flow of information and materials. Ideas, religions, healing knowledge, medicines, spices, fabrics, art, handicrafts, and natural resources have flowed along this route from India, China, and even the Middle East. There is a reason that Thai massage has evolved into what it is now, and we would be wise to respect that, and to fully understand it in our hearts. It is our privilege to embody the essence of the Thai spirit through loving kindness, compassion, respect, humility, mindfulness, selfless service of others, and an authentic practice of traditional Thai massage.



Better body mechanics

Practitioners use better body mechanics on the floor rather than on a table. When we practice Thai massage on a mat, and we work at the same height from the floor as our client, so it is much easier to work from our center, and to use leverage, body weight and gravity.

Wide variety of techniques and positions

Part of the power and versatility of Thai massage is the ability to work on our clients in more body positions than are possible on a table: supine, both side positions, prone, and sitting. Sitting position is virtually impossible to do on a table, and is at best very limited. There is not enough room to properly do back bends, spinal twists, and traction moves for which sitting position is best suited.

More space

Would you practice yoga on a table? Of course not. Thai massage requires just as much space as for yoga, even more when you take the practitioner into account. On a floor mat, we can move more freely and use the broad scope of Thai massage positions, techniques and stretches to more thoroughly meet our clients' needs. There are many important Thai moves that simply cannot be executed on a table, or that may be dangerous or distracting. On a table, therapists remain standing most of the time, and this severely restricts the scope and fluidity of Thai massage that we can practice, and our work can become more static and contrived. Although we put our clients in some yoga postures in Thai massage, we practitioners are moving in more of a Tai Chi manner, and we need plenty of space for graceful and unrestricted movement. There is an important aspect of Thai massage that resembles dance or moving meditation. We need to have enough space as possible to freely move around our client's body as we work.

Maximum use of feet and knees

We can use feet and knees far more effectively on a mat than on a table. Experienced Thai massage practitioners use feet and knees extensively during the course of a session, and it is virtually impossible to use feet and knees on a table, even with bars or ropes hanging from the ceiling. Sometimes we use feet and knees for leverage, and sometimes for downward, broad pressure on large muscles. In side position, for example, I stand up to knee-press a client's gluteal muscles in the hip. On a table, there is simply not enough room. In side position, I often knee-press tibialis anterior, peroneus longus, and lateral quadriceps muscles, and I work their erector spinae muscles as well. Neither of these moves can be done on a table. A common Thai technique is to foot-press around a client's scapula in side position, which in my opinion is the best way to work around their shoulder blades.



Once again, this fabulous move is not possible to execute on a table.

Better promotion for Thai Massage

First-time Thai massage clients deserve to have a wonderful experience, a session that is representative of nuad boran's holistic power and versatility. Two things can prevent people from receiving a true taste of Thai massage: 1) practitioners who lack experience or have not studied enough authentic Thai massage with qualified teachers; and 2) massage on a table that is presented as "Thai."

To address the first situation, we are fortunate to have the Thai Healing Alliance International (THAI), the only true professional association for Thai massage, which proposes sev-

eral levels of expertise. Now the general public can choose to receive Thai massage only from THAI-approved practitioners, and have a better chance of experiencing authentic Thai massage. Likewise, if spas and massage schools only hire instructors and practitioners that are approved by THAI, they would be more likely to have a higher quality of instruction and to produce better Thai massage practitioners. These factors, in turn, will afford the general public a better chance of experiencing a great first Thai session.

Regarding massage on a table being marketed as "Thai," more education and awareness are needed. The word "Thai" has marketing power because many people seem to associate "Thai" with something exotic, tropical, and exciting. However I believe that anyone who cares about the long-term growth and profitability of authentic Thai massage will avoid using the word "Thai" for any type



of bodywork that is not done on the floor in traditional style. Personally, I associate "Thai" with excellence and powerful versatility in bodywork. Table massage that claims to be "Thai" is so watered-down and stripped of its versatility and power that it ends up being a variation on the theme of Swedish massage, which does a great disservice to authentic Thai massage. Since Thai massage is relatively new in North America and Europe, it is of extreme importance that people's first experience with Thai Massage be one of good quality, so that people say, "Wow! That's amazing!" When massage clients receive their first regular massage on a table, and it is not satisfactory, they usually know enough to try again with another massage therapist. If a client's first Thai Massage is less than wonderful however, they do not have a strong point of reference for how it should feel. They are unlikely to know that they need to try again with a more competent Thai massage practitioner. Since the general massage public is becoming more knowledgeable and sophisticated all the time, most clients are very willing to lie on a mat to try Thai massage, and they will quickly recognize the extraordinary benefits of this work in its proper setting.

Everything is better on a mat

There is absolutely nothing that I do on a table that I cannot do better on a mat on the floor. So why bother? In my opinion, there is nothing to be gained by performing Thai massage on a table. Since 1996, I have incorporated Thai massage into over 6000 hours of table massage. Adapting Thai massage techniques to the table has vastly improved my work beyond what I learned in massage school, but I would never call it "Thai massage." And deep in my heart, I know that what I do on floor mat is far superior to anything I can do on a table.