



Left to Right: Prof. Gerry Bodeker, Dr. Martina and Harald Kitz

Dr Martina Hoermann, Harald's partner, explained that the movements utilized in Haki relax key muscle groups and allow spinal re-alignment. After one treatment, I was inclined to agree and pondered accepting Harald's invitation to visit The Hotel Hochschober where he has his primary base.

Some months later, work took me to Austria for meetings in Vienna for an international public health project. One of my colleagues in the project, Dr Wolfgang Schachinger, is also a family physician who has studied Ayurveda and directs the Maharishi Ayurveda clinic in the market town of Ried, about halfway between Munich and Vienna (www.ayurvedaarzt.at). Thus began my journey into Asian health traditions and their new home in Austria.

Ried is a conservative town, where the same families have lived and worked for many generations. And Dr Schachinger's family practice sees them all – from babies to the elderly, young couples and families. Traditional in their Austrian values and local in their outlook, they are using Ayurveda for their well-being and preventative healthcare. I had time for only two days of Ayurvedic massage – *abhyanga* and Ayurvedic herbal treatment at this clinic, but it was on a par with the best I have had in India or elsewhere. If time had allowed, I would have stayed for more, but before Vienna and a round of meetings, there was the call of the Alps.

With no preconception, and having had no time to read travel guides, I set off from Salzburg, humming from the Magic Flute in fond memory of Mozart, Salzburg's most famous son. Jumping aboard just as the train pulled out of Salzburg station, there was a delicious feeling of adventure to come – no details, just a sense.

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As my head rolled from side to side, swaying gently in a soft sling held by Harald Kitz, founder of Haki (www.haki.cc), I drifted off into dreamland, far from my treatment room in The Spa at Kuala Lumpur's Mandarin Oriental. Rested, soothed and somehow reoriented after the treatment, I heard Harald's voice saying, "you must come and visit us in the Austrian Alps."

The Spa at the Mandarin in Kuala Lumpur is one of a small, select group of international destinations which have licensed Haki as a new signature treatment, and the first Asian destination to do so. And it is getting favourable reports from clients. Conceived and developed in Harald's home region of Carinthia in southern Austria, Haki draws on Harald's long family tradition of musical training. Also trained as a physical therapist, and having journeyed in search of profound touch techniques in Asia, Haki was developed to combine massage methods with vibrations and rhythms and so release tension and stress from the shoulders and neck. Simply put, its theme is: stretch and relax. In an age when the computer hunch is the new upright and repeated stress injury, lower back pain and neck pain are endemic among computer users, this is an idea that has to catch on.



The journey to Carinthia is spectacular, through high alpine passes, past picture-book villages nestled along the slopes and deep in the valleys, with towering peaks and mountain forests as their backdrop.

Although Carinthia, Austria's southernmost province, was not previously known to me, I was to learn that this alpine region, esteemed among those-who-know for its perfect skiing conditions, has the highest amount of sunshine in Austria – a boon for travellers whose gloom factor rises with winter. Sun, snow, alpine scenery – surely all of this would be enough? Yet, the journey was about to begin.

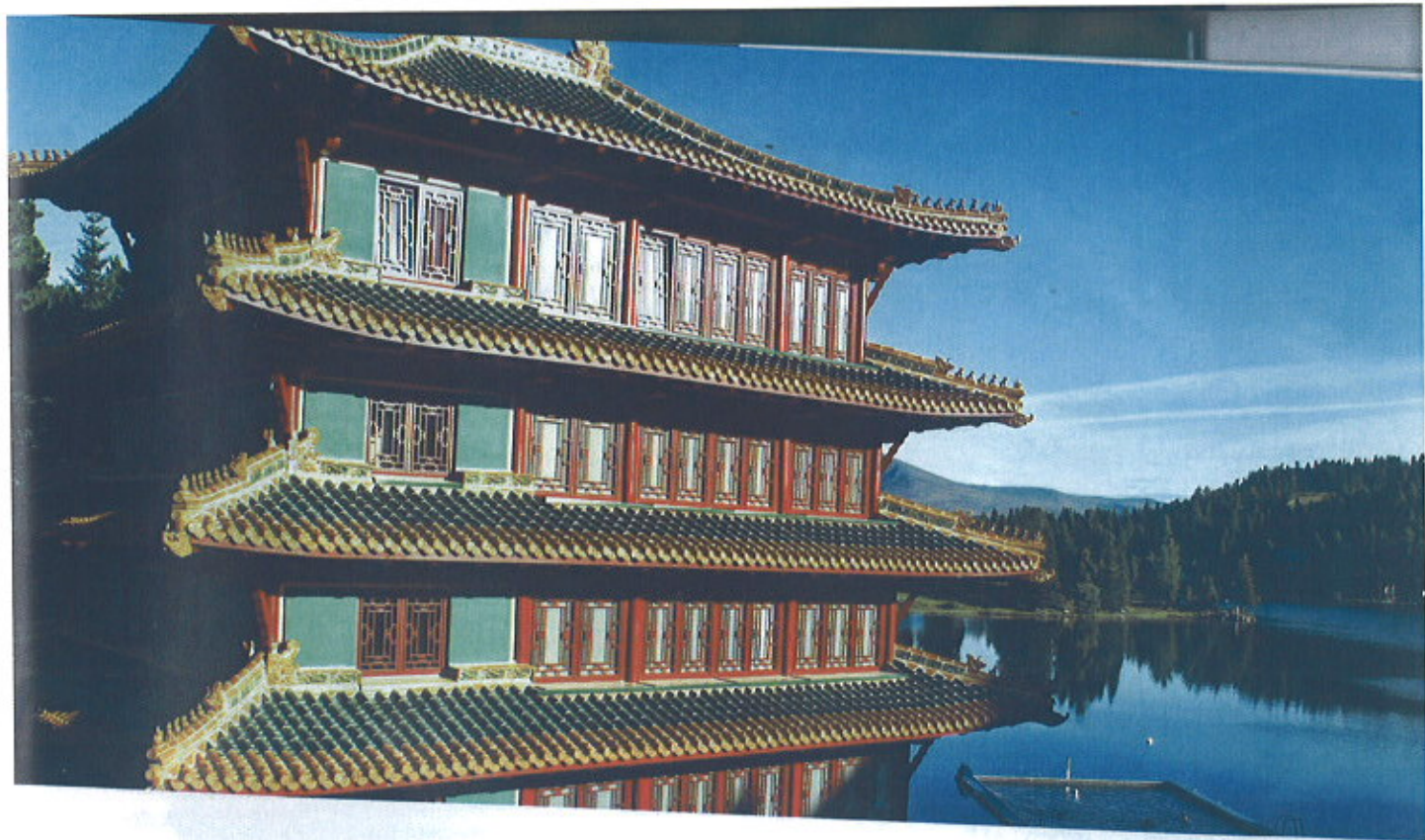
Welcoming me at the small station an hour from the Hotel Hochschober was Dr Martina, whom I'd last seen months before in Kuala Lumpur. Remembering her tanned and trim in a white linen dress, I strained hard to identify her now in the big snow jacket, jeans and snow boots. This wasn't Southeast Asia...

As we drove through ever-more dramatic landscapes, Martina mentioned that Haki had been nominated for a major international

spa award and that The Times of London had sent a journalist to Hochschober for an article on Haki. The journalist wrote: "all the rage in Central Europe (...) the Haki plays your body like an instrument (...) and all surrounding tension dissolves away". On arrival Harald Kitz met me and explained that there were now offers to expand to London and elsewhere. Clearly, the word was out... time to get in before the rush!

The Hochschober's grounds, set by a pristine alpine lake 1,800 metres above sea-level and surrounded by ski slopes, is a surprise waiting. Connected to the classic Austrian timber building is a four-storey Chinese tower looking as natural as it might in the mountains of Henan Province, home to the Shaolin monks and to Professor Zhang, a renowned landmark preservation expert, who guided the Hochschober team on the design and construction of the tower.

The Hochschober (www.hochschober.at) has been in the Leeb family since 1926 and has evolved substantially with each new generation. Family scion, Peter Leeb, after inaugurating



a Turkish hammam at Hochschober in 1998, made a visit to China and was taken with the refined atmosphere of an ancient Shanghai tea-house. Why not offer this experience to their guests?

After five years of careful research and planning in China and Austria, a massive silver fir frame began to rise by the lake, connected to the hotel by an underground passage. Design experts and artisans came from China while Austrian-Chinese tea masters guided on the spaces, rituals and the selection of teas and utensils. The roof tiles, modelled on those in the Forbidden City in Beijing, were ordered in over-supply to account for the harsh effects of winter on their vibrant green glaze.

The Hochschober, now managed by Peter Leeb's daughter Karin and her husband Martin Klein, retains its original European après-ski resort atmosphere – with steam baths and ice dips, ever-changing arrays of organic snacks, local cheeses and fresh yogurts, and a heated outdoor pool in the lake. Yet, in keeping with the globalization of Asian healing traditions, it has expanded to include a steamy and

authentic hammam, complete with classical Moorish arches, mosaics, steam rooms and a heated marble slab. And now the Chinese tower has become a focal point of serenity, offering bath-robed guests timeless tranquillity as they gaze across the lake, sipping the best *pu'er* tea or practicing *qi gong* or participating in a traditional Chinese tea ceremony.

Each floor of the tower has a different theme. On one, a doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine has a clinic, doubtless one of the most scenic in the world. Dr Luo, who trained at a prestigious Beijing traditional medicine academy, has been practising in Austria for some years. As he deftly palpated my pulse and examined my tongue, he correctly honed in on the neck and back pressures that come with extended computer use, pinpointing the most tender spots precisely. I need Haki, I thought. However, in a moment Dr Luo had me up on his treatment bed, which was glowing gold as sunset streamed across the lake though the paneled Chinese windows, and quickly began a combination of acupuncture, Tui Na (Chinese pressure-point massage) and moxibustion. Chinese medicine explains





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moxa, as it is known, as a treatment where a small amount of mugwort herb (*artemisia vulgaris*) is burned over an acupuncture point to release aromatic oils and send herbalized warmth travelling through a specific meridian or energy channel. I certainly felt the flow – and the glow. Reluctantly stirring, feeling that I had just dream-travelled across from my original slumber at The Spa at The Mandarin in KL, all traces of aches and pains were gone. Dr Luo’s is clearly an ideal programme for sore or twisted muscles after skiing, as well as for longer-term problems that come along with guests arriving at Hoschober. Not surprisingly, the doctor is fully booked most days.

Taking rest after treatment, the tea-room on the tower’s fourth floor offers tranquillity and the best of tea selections. Spring water from the nearby mountain, the Turracher Hoehe, is soft, with only low amount of calcium, and is as fresh as water can be, piped in directly from the mountain. For the tea-house guest with an eye to the outside world there is also a good selection of leading international newspapers – if you really have to bring your mind down from mountain and back into the world.

Reluctantly leaving this timeless and elevated atmosphere to return to the main building, one

journeys back via the underground tunnel. This has been cleverly designed as a walk along the Silk Route – the ancient trade passage between Western Asia and China. Leaving the tower, one passes by a large Buddha and several artifacts from Western China, progressing towards a more Middle Eastern theme, until eventually arriving in the sensual, steamy world of the hammam. The concept of a personal journey is now central in high-quality-spa planning. Hochschober’s Silk Route journey exemplifies the different experiences – inner and outer – of the treatment offerings from West and East Asia.

As I bade farewell to my new friends, Hotel Hoschober’s owner-managers Karin Leeb and Martin Klein were preparing to leave for two weeks for an Ayurvedic centre in Kerala. With Ayurveda in Ried in middle-Austria, Haki now established in Asia, and Hotel Hochschober giving fresh direction to the ski world with its Asian-themed spa programmes, these developments seem to exemplify Asia’s leading position in the global spa movement. Indeed, given the Leeb and Klein family’s penchant for Asian innovation, it would not be a surprise to find Kerala on the march to the land of snow and sun... *sa*