

FREE CLIENT GUIDE

Thai Massage: History, Energy Lines and What to Expect

By the ProMasseurs editorial team | Updated September 26, 2026 | 6 min read

Thai massage is a traditional practice performed on a mat, fully clothed, combining rhythmic pressure with assisted stretching. This guide covers its history, the idea of energy lines, the main techniques and what to expect from a session.

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SECTION 01

History & Philosophy

Thai massage, known in Thailand as nuad thai or nuad boran, has been practised for centuries and draws on Indian, Chinese and Southeast Asian healing traditions. It is traditionally associated with Buddhist temples, where it was taught and practised alongside herbal medicine. In 2019 UNESCO added nuad thai to its list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The practice is often described as mindful and meditative. Traditional practitioners approach each session with an attitude of loving kindness, known as metta, and work slowly and attentively. Modern Thai massage keeps these roots while adapting pace and pressure to each client.

SECTION 02

Energy Lines

Traditional Thai massage theory describes a network of energy lines called sen that run through the body. Classical texts refer to many lines, and teaching usually focuses on ten main ones, the sen sip. Practitioners work along these lines with rhythmic pressure, with the aim of easing blockages and restoring balance.

These ideas come from traditional philosophy rather than modern anatomy, and they are best understood as the framework the practice is taught in. In practice, many sen lines follow muscle groups and areas that commonly hold tension, which is one reason clients often find the work relieving.

SECTION 03

Traditional Techniques

Thai massage is performed on a padded floor mat rather than a table, and no oil is used. The practitioner uses palms, thumbs, forearms, elbows, knees and feet to apply rhythmic pressure along the body, often rocking gently to help the client relax.

The best-known element is assisted stretching. The practitioner moves the client through yoga-like positions, gently stretching the hips, hamstrings, back, shoulders and neck. Good practitioners move slowly, use their body weight carefully and stay well within the client's comfortable range.

SECTION 04

Benefits

Clients commonly report feeling more flexible, less stiff and more energised after Thai massage, often with a pleasant sense of calm. The combination of pressure and stretching makes it popular with people who sit for long hours, practise yoga or want a more active style of bodywork.

As with any massage, results vary. Thai massage may not be suitable for people with recent injuries, joint problems, osteoporosis or uncontrolled high blood pressure. Let your practitioner know about any health conditions before you start, and check with your doctor if you are unsure.

SECTION 05

What to Expect

Wear loose, comfortable clothing such as a T-shirt and stretchy trousers, or use the clothing your practitioner provides. Sessions usually last 60 to 120 minutes. Avoid eating a large meal in the two hours beforehand, as some stretches involve the abdomen and hips.

Expect to be moved into different positions: lying on your back, front and side, and sometimes seated. Pressure can be firm. Breathe steadily, stay relaxed and tell your practitioner if any stretch or pressure feels like too much. Drink water afterwards and give yourself time to rest.

Key takeaways

- Thai massage is done fully clothed on a floor mat, without oil.
- It combines rhythmic pressure along sen energy lines with assisted stretching.
- Nuad thai is recognised by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- Wear loose clothing and avoid a heavy meal beforehand.
- Stretches should never hurt; tell your practitioner if anything is too intense.

Frequently asked questions

Do you stay clothed during Thai massage?

Yes. Traditional Thai massage is done fully clothed on a floor mat, without oil.

Is Thai massage painful?

It can involve firm pressure and deep stretches, but it should never be painful. Tell your practitioner if anything feels too intense.

How is Thai massage different from Swedish massage?

Swedish massage uses oil and flowing strokes on a table. Thai massage uses rhythmic pressure and assisted stretching on a mat, fully clothed.

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This guide is general information, not medical advice. Speak to a doctor before booking a massage if you have an injury, a medical condition or are unsure whether massage is right for you.