

The Sunday Telegraph

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body + soul

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AUSTRALIA'S NEW FOOD LABELS DECODED

What the new star ratings
mean and how to make the
best choice for your family

+
THE THREE-MOVE
BODY OVERHAUL
4 WAYS TO SLOW
DOWN AND RELAX



HAPPY 15TH
BIRTHDAY
BODY + SOUL!



WELLNESS
DESTINATION
OF THE MONTH



THE RUNDOWN

The cost: A three-night package (the minimum stay) twin-share in an Ocean View room, starts from about \$1600 per person, including all meals. A Taste of Chiva-Som package includes a daily treatment, eight daily classes and six extra therapies/treatments. **Getting there:** Hua Hin is a two-and-a-half hour drive from Bangkok. Chiva-Som offers a pick-up service from Bangkok for an additional cost. **Top tip:** Do the half-hour beach walk to the giant Buddha statue at Khao Takiab, aka "Chopsticks Hill", then take a dip in the sea – it's clear, warm, reviving and peaceful. **More info:** chivasom.com

HUA HIN, THAILAND

CHIVA-SOM

Fiona Baker becomes a health retreat convert after five days of bliss

Five days, alone, in a world-renowned health retreat in Thailand. What will I do? Who will I talk to? And what should I wear?

Being relatively unschooled in the ways of the health spa – for years, family holidays have consisted of eating sandy chicken sandwiches under beach igloos – I can't imagine how I'll fill my time. I pack books to read by the pool (Chiva-Som bans the public use of digital devices such as e-readers) and read up on day trips and tourist attractions around nearby Hua Hin, the pretty coastal resort town 185km south of Bangkok.

However, I don't read a page of a book and I only manage a quick dip in the pool on the last day, just so I can say I have. I'm too busy, but in a gloriously healthy and fulfilling kind of way. As an enthusiastic new devotee, I don't want to let any opportunity pass.

For newcomers to the luxury health retreat world – in which a dedicated following chase the retreat sun around the globe – Chiva-Som can feel as if you've stepped into the world of the rich, famous and thoroughly pampered.

With its 2.8 hectares of lush serenity dotted with discrete villas, Chiva-Som – which means "haven

of life" – is all about the wellbeing journey and ensuring that you leave feeling healthier and happier than when you arrive. It's up to you how you make use of the facilities, advice and hours in the day.

It starts with creating your own daily program with a health and wellness advisor. Chiva-Som knows it has limited time to make a true health impact, so even the most basic packages – there are 11 to choose from – include extras so you don't have to put your hand into your pocket after arrival. Each day is happily consumed by health consultations, exercise classes, therapies and pampering.

I'd expected everything to be tailored to the rich and idle, so I'm surprised to get my heart rate up at aqua aerobics and feel muscles shake in the dawn stretch class.

Even with Chiva-Som 80 per cent full, I often feel as if I'm the only one there, being pampered by a smiling but almost invisible wellness team. I'd worried about the days of endless solitude, but I'm too busy and too protective of this solo gift to miss the chatter.

For meals, guests gather at one of two dining areas – a restaurant with water views or an alfresco beachfront area that overlooks the turquoise Gulf of Thailand –

"I'm surprised to find it isn't filled with CEOs and pampered housewives"

to eat the tastiest health food I've ever had. Sure, the eggs benedict isn't much bigger than a scallop, but it's a flavour explosion. (They don't tell you how much you can eat here, but the serves are small so you don't overeat; if you're starving, you simply order more.)

The eating areas are quiet but those who want to chat can gather at the "talkers' table". It's here that people with a passion, and means, to be a world-class health retreat junkie share their must-have treatments and must-go destinations. However, I'm surprised to find it isn't filled with CEOs and pampered housewives, but people who save for wellness vacations because they love them.

Chiva-Som is the place to experience the buzz that comes from being healthy and active, or to kick-start a better way of living. You'll come back changed, you won't know where the time went and it won't matter what you wore.



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