

Located in the Prachuap Khiri Khan province a mere one hour plane ride south of Bangkok hides one of Thailand's most exclusive health retreats. **Rebecca Walker** heads into detox for a week and returns in a state of bliss.



"**S**awatdee!" Smiles a beaming face...and another, and another. I've only just stepped out of a car and off the plane from Hong Kong to Bangkok, Bangkok to Hua Hin and am feeling all a bit weary, yet within minutes of walking into the Chiva Som International Health Resort a sense of tranquil calm washes over me. Greeted by a glass of cool lemongrass water, cold towel and a welcoming committee of friendly staff who whisk my bag away and walk me past lush landscaped gardens and open-air yoga pavilions to my private bungalow, it is immediately apparent that I am in capable healing hands.

On the Map

While lesser known than Phuket or Koh Samui, the quiet beaches and quaint countryside of Hua Hin is just as charming, if not more, than its high profile counterparts. Laid back to the point of sleepy, the slow pace of life there and slightly ramshackle style of the town centre makes it hard to believe the province is a mere three hour-drive from the bustling neon-lit streets of Bangkok.

Into the Spirit

When a retreat calls itself a 'Haven of Life' and carries a reputation for being one of the best luxury health resorts in Asia and one of the top destination spas and in the world, its got quite a lot to live up to. Considering the fact that the property itself only encompasses 57 standard-size rooms and villas spread across seven tropical acres of beach-front land, surely this is an overstatement? After all, wellness resorts are one of travel's biggest boom sectors and spanking new super spas seem to open every second week all around Asia. Chiva Som on the other hand is 13 years old, practically a grandmother in terms!

Yet, after 24-hours in the resort I completely understood what sets Chiva Som apart: understated discretion. Rather like comparing 'old money' to the flashiness of 'new', its tasteful architecture and high-end yet unpretentious facilities carry an air of

Holistic Hua Hin

distinguished class that makes its younger contenders seem like they're trying too hard. This is a place that is sure of itself and values the discretion of its guests above all else. The rules are simple: no cameras, no mobile phones except in the privacy of your room, strictly no children under 16 and a wellness policy that helps people help themselves rather than leading them by the nose to better health.

The Program

Whether you decide to engage in a fitness overhaul, regular detox or just a stress reduction program, each and every guest starts their holistic holiday with a comprehensive questionnaire and health and wellness consultation with one of the retreat's resident nutritionists. Measuring everything from blood pressure to height, weight and overall health concerns, this is a great opportunity to have a top to toe wellness assessment after which an appropriate 'remedy' program is assigned.

As well as the wellness consultation, each guest is entitled to a complimentary 'physical analysis' with one of the resident physios who checks both muscle and bone health and recommends treatments for irregularities.

The Package

Each program comes with a package. This means that if you opt to detox you don't just go on a juice fast, you are given vitamins and mineral supplements as well as a daily treatment schedule that consists of an overabundant range of spa, medical and alternative body treatments including everything from traditional Thai massage to live blood cell analysis, iridology, reiki and various hydrotherapy treatments on top of the usual facials, scrubs and wraps. There is also a separate 'medi-spa' which dishes out everything from botox to vein laser treatments.

The Daily Routine

At first it might seem a bit indulgent to wander around in a dressing gown all day going from treatment to treatment, but after a few days of it you begin to wonder how



you ever had time to do anything else. The activity schedule is packed with everything from yoga to aqua aerobics, tai chi training, cooking classes and even 'gyrokinesis' sessions and by the time you consume your five daily juices, do some activities and complete your treatments, you will barely have time left over for a lazy sunbake!

Tranquility, Tranquility, Tranquility

What is at once and continually striking about the resort is the sense of absolute Zen that permeates each and every corner of its grounds. Without exaggeration, you literally wake up to the sound of birds singing in the morning and go to sleep listening to crickets chirp at night. Serene silence wafts around everywhere and is only ever interrupted by the occasional blast of a juice blender or gardening maintenance.

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While this may be attributed to the lack of noisy children running around, it probably has more to do with the fact that everyone is walking around in a somewhat dreamlike, post-treatment state. What's more, other than a small boutique there are no other 'normal resort' distractions to busy yourself

with which inevitably forces people to slow down and engage in the program or just bask in the luxury of R & R. What's more, Chiva Som has a staff-to-guest ratio of four to one, which means before you even realise you might be thirsty an attentive member of staff has already given you a bottle of water.

Pre-cleansing Preparation Tips

- On rising drink one large glass warm water with 1/2 lemon or whole fresh lime.
- Eliminate all stimulants including tea, coffee, chocolate, alcohol and soft drinks.
- Try to refrain from smoking.
- Avoid all meat and by-products from animals and poultry.
- Eat more fish, nuts, seeds and fermented products (tempeh, tofu and sauerkraut).
- Avoid pasteurised dairy products from cows including milk, cheese and yoghurt.
- Increase salads and steamed vegetables with simple light dressings.
- Make fresh dressings with combinations of cold-pressed organic oils (extra virgin olive oil, coconut oil, sesame oil or walnut oil, lime juice or apple cider vinegar, tahini or miso, maple syrup or organic honey)
- Enjoy smoothies for breakfast



This kind of intuitive service definitely leads to a sense of calm.

Feel The Burn

Whether you are a gym junkie or not, it is impossible not to get caught up in the fitness-focused atmosphere of the resort and as well as a gym, indoor and outdoor pool, outdoor yoga and Tai Chi pavilion and dance and pilates studio, there are adventure training services and personal coaches on hand whip you into shape after a fitness consultation and body composition analysis. Chiva Som also has a signature health and fitness programme called 'Functional Insight Training' (FIT), which is a great compliment to the detox programme if you want to lose weight. Combining elements of pilates, 'proprioceptive' awareness, body balancing, meditation, self-reflection and

breathing techniques, it is an all-in-one approach to fitness.

Detox Dining

While the first three to five days of the detox program entails a liquid diet of juices, wheatgrass shots and lime infused water, the menus of the retreat's two restaurants are brimming with healthy Thai and western dishes that have been imaginatively reconfigured sans fat and salt. While staff encourage you to abstain from your usual gastronomic indulgences, fine wine and yummy deserts still feature on the menu and it is up to each individual to exercise self-discipline. Case in point: this is a luxury retreat, not boot camp.

The End Result

Even if you simply follow the detox program

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and lay off the exercise you will walk away from Chiva Som radiating a kind of glow that always seems impossible to achieve in the 'outside world'. The clichés are all true; you really do feel more alert and energetic, your skin really does gleam and your eyes really do sparkle after a detox. What's more

the kilos inevitably slip off, the dark bags under your eyes fade and the tension in your shoulders dissipates as the days go on. I've often heard the "I feel like a new person" line and little cynical but after one week in Chiva Som I am officially reformed. As Schwarzenegger said best, "I'll be back."

A typical Five-night Detox Retreat Includes:

- Five nights accommodation
- Naturopathic consultation on arrival
- Physical analysis with resident physio
- Three to five-Day monitored cleanse
- One set of herbal detox supplements
- One cleansing body cocoon
- One chi nei tsang (abdominal/organ massage)
- Fifty-minute massage each day
- Three spa cuisine meals each day
- Complimentary participation in the daily activity and fitness schedule
- Participation in the daily fitness and leisure activity programs
- Complimentary use of the water therapy suites which include steam, sauna and Jacuzzi

Cathay Pacific Holidays Dream Detox Package

Until December this year, Cathay Pacific is hosting an all-inclusive detox package at Chiva Som.

Package includes:

- Two Round trip Economy Class flight between Hong Kong and Bangkok on Cathay Pacific Airways
- Two Round trip private car transfer between airport and hotel
- Five consecutive nights accommodation at Chiva Som detox retreat and a follow up three nights accommodation within three months
- Three Chiva Som spa cuisine meals per day

Initial five nights Detox Retreat includes:

- Naturopathic consultation on arrival
- Three to five-day Monitored Cleanse
- One set of herbal detox supplements
- A fifty-minute massage
- Between stays, Chiva-Som provides ongoing regular communication by email with a naturopath

Follow-up three night Spa Pampering Retreat includes:

- Follow up naturopathic consultation
- One Chiva Som Spa Haven Body Cocoon
- One Rebalancing balneotherapy
- A fifty-minute massage
- Travel Insurance

For details go to: www.cxholidays.com

For more information about Chiva Som visit www.chivasom.com