

Heavenly Haven



Chiva-Som – meaning ‘Haven of Life’ – was voted the best spa destination in the world by Condé Nast Traveler in 2004; and for the past six years, it has been one of the top three. So my fellow spa-aholic and I knew we were in for a huge treat.

Your stay starts with a consultation to establish your health and emotional status. Based on her assessment, the likeable English medical doctor Sue runs through the available treatments to help you to make the most of your stay. “We’re a health and wellness resort attached to a hotel. Most other spa destinations are hotels with a spa attached, but our main focus is health,” she emphasises.

But Chiva-Som is not a boot camp. You can do as much or as little as you like. The spa cuisine is in itself detoxifying, using top-quality organic ingredients – either raw or lightly cooked to perfection – and excluding saturated fat. To speed up the cleansing process, you can opt for a three-day cleansing fast consisting mainly of fresh fruit- and vegetable-juices.

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Spa Cuisine

There are excellent buffets for both breakfast and lunch, served either in the gorgeous Emerald Room or on its terrace, or at the open-air pool restaurant. You help yourself without restriction, but next to every item is a small card indicating its nutritional content. The same is true of items on the dinner menu, which is a three-course *a la carte* delight – spa cuisine at its very best.



Spa Magic

Our package included a daily 50-minute massage, either:

- Chiva-Som – fairly light and done with oil,
- traditional Thai, or
- invigorating – a favourite.

We loved them all. For an additional fee, you can upgrade to one of a list of longer or more complex massage alternatives. I had to try the Five Elements massage, which incorporates hot black volcanic stones and icy-cold marble ones. The hot and cold stones are strategically placed on your body's meridian points, and used to massage essential oil blends into your muscles.

Water Shiatsu

To relieve stress, Dr Sue recommended water shiatsu, also known as 'Watsu'. This was 55 minutes of sheer bliss. After flotation bands had been attached to my calves, I closed my eyes, lay back and relaxed completely. While soothing oriental music played, the therapist (supporting my head throughout) cradled me in her arms and moved me through the warm water in a series of gentle, balletic movements, while systematically massaging pressure points down the length of the muscles of my back, neck, arms and legs.

House Rules

It's no wonder that the service is outstanding: the ratio of staff to guests is five-to-one. General manager Paul Linder is Swiss, and it shows in the immaculate attention to detail. For example, when you come off the beach – which is very good for walking, running or riding the local horses on – the smiling guard hands you a bottle of chilled water and a lemongrass-scented face-towel.

I managed to take a few photographs, but this was



actively discouraged, to protect the privacy of rich and famous guests. There are other restrictions, too – no children under 16 are accepted; no mobile phones may be used, except in your room; and alcohol is restricted to wine and champagne, served only after 6pm.

Treatments

There is a mind-boggling range of treatments to choose from. In addition to all the usual ones, you can try: meditation counselling (with a Thai Buddhist monk), cranio-sacral therapy, live blood testing, equilibriopathy, water shiatsu, and bio-terrain analysis – to mention just a few. Apart from these alternative therapies, there is the full gamut of beauty treatments, from wraps and scrubs to facials of all descriptions and even laser therapy, Thermage and mesotherapy.

Fitness Activities

The changing daily schedule of fitness activities are all led by excellent specialist trainers. I had always wanted to try *tai chi*, so 7am saw me at the pool pavilion with a dozen or so other early risers – what a good opportunity to try something new! I would have liked to have done everything on the daily programme, but of course that was impossible. I tried *pranayama* (yoga breathing), flow yoga, aquarobics, and metabolic breathing exercises. During our three-day stay, there was also a Pilates mat class, a fitball class, Thai boxing, Thai folk dance, a beach power walk, gyrokinesis, a stretch class, a group bike ride, aerobics, body rolling, and much more.

Colon Hydrotherapy

I've left the best for last – colon hydrotherapy, also known as colonic irrigation. This is one of Chiva-Som's signature treatments. All the resort's therapists are registered nurses, who have been trained to international standards by Chiva-Som's UK consultants. When I wondered aloud to Dr Sue whether you, our readers, would be interested in hearing about it, she said emphatically, "Yes! Everyone is obsessed with their bowels."

Colonic hydrotherapy helps cleanse the colon (the last five foot or so of intestinal tube) of toxins, gas, accumulated faecal matter and mucus deposits. If the colon is not functioning properly, it is prone to diseases such as constipation, diverticulitis, colitis and bowel cancer.

I underwent colon hydrotherapy mostly for research purposes, but was an instant convert. In fact, I booked another session for the very next day. Generally, a course of three or more sessions is recommended. As Dr Sue says, it's not the most pleasant thing you'll ever do, but the benefits are immediate.

First, you lie on your side while the therapist inserts a disposable plastic speculum into the rectum. This is not painful, you'll be glad to hear. Then, warm water is slowly introduced into the colon (the large intestine) under low pressure via a small tube. When the colon is filled, the water is allowed to flow out through a larger tube, bringing with it any loose debris. The therapist repeats the process a number of times during the session, which lasts from 30 to 40 minutes. The result is a gentle flushing of the colon, and removal of old faecal matter – called 'plaque' – that has built up over the years.

Highly professional, reassuring and gentle, the therapist continually monitors the flow and gives you feedback. My therapist also massaged my colon at regular intervals to facilitate the process; at other times, she massaged the foot reflexology point that reflects the bowel.

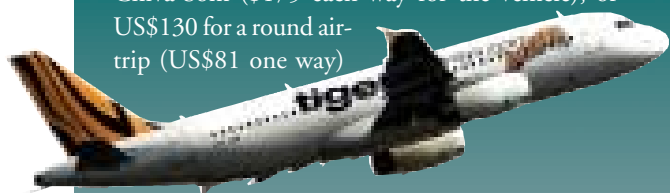
So, how did I feel at the end of it all? Clean, very clean – both inside and out!



Getting There:

We flew Tiger Airways to Bangkok – this no-frills yet efficient and reliable airline is the best way to go, and you can put the money you save towards an extra treatment at Chiva-Som. To make the most of our first day, we left Singapore on the 8:35 flight and got to Bangkok at 10:00. Visit www.tigerairways.com for up to date information on their flight schedules, which vary according to the season. Booking online is easy and convenient; seating is unallocated, and is on a first come first served basis, but for a two-to-three hour flight that's no problem at all.

Once you get to Bangkok Airport, it's a two-and-a-half hour drive by Mercedes limousine to Chiva-Som (\$175 each way for the vehicle); or US\$130 for a round air-trip (US\$81 one way)



to Hua Hin airport by 12-seater Cessna Caravan. We took the limousine in and flew out. In the end, both ways take about the same amount of time. Chiva-Som made all arrangements for transfers.

Costs:

We had only three days, but I would suggest that you need at least five days at Chiva-Som. A five-night inclusive package starts from about S\$4,000 per person sharing, and includes three spa meals a day, a daily basic massage of your choice, free use of the water therapy suite which includes steam, sauna and Jacuzzi, credits towards optional treatments, and fitness activities including yoga, *tai chi*, aerobics, aquarobics and many more. To find out more about their specialist retreats, see www.chivasom.com or email reserve@chivasom.com