



**T**here are so few places in the world one can go to in order to really hit the pause button to any great effect, but Chiva-Som is one of them.

Situated about three hours' drive south of Bangkok in Thailand, the health resort has been in operation for 22 years, and in that time has garnered awards and a reputation that's put it at the pinnacle of wellness, encouraging guests along a path of real change that lasts beyond the airport. It may sound like a long way to go for a spot of reiki and some gourmet low-cal cuisine, but truly, it's a game-changer.

On arrival, there's the matter of an eight-page health questionnaire to complete, which forms the basis of your protocol. After an hour-long consultation, conducted pretty much once your bags are delivered to your elegant room or pavilion (you wonder what you'll talk about for an hour, and yet the time flies), you emerge with a mission, and a timetable packed with treatments, therapies, massages and some (optional) group activities. There's also an eating plan, because the majority of guests come to Chiva-Som with weight loss in mind, but it seems to come lower down the scale in terms of emphasis, testament to the "fix your mind, and your body will follow" school of thought. So after deep-diving into the questionnaire, packages for wellness, fitness, stress management, detoxification and more are considered, along with a meal plan to match. I went for the stress management one, which included reflexology, craniosacral therapy, an appointment with

# The road to WELLNESS

**MELANIE MORRIS** joins the rich and famous at the world's most luxurious wellness resort.

a naturopath (more of that in a moment), yoga, personal training, two physiotherapy sessions for some long-standing sciatica, guided meditation, and a heap of amazing massages.

Chiva-Som is not cheap, but in terms of value, it's smart. The resort rate includes the chosen package (yes, all that I listed above), meals, accommodation, lectures, and a full schedule of lifestyle, exercise and holistic activities. Additional sessions and therapies can be booked at individual charge, but I found it totally unnecessary – I had plenty to do and try each day between lolling around the pool and power walking up and down adjacent Hua Hin Beach.

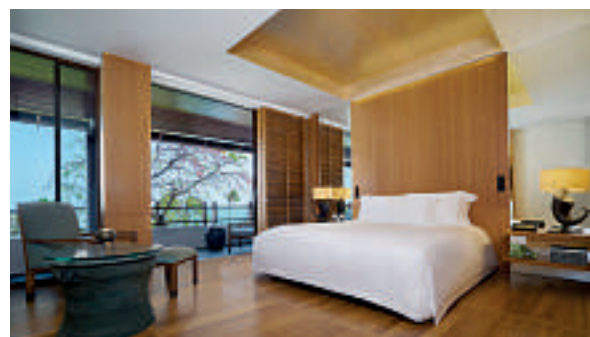
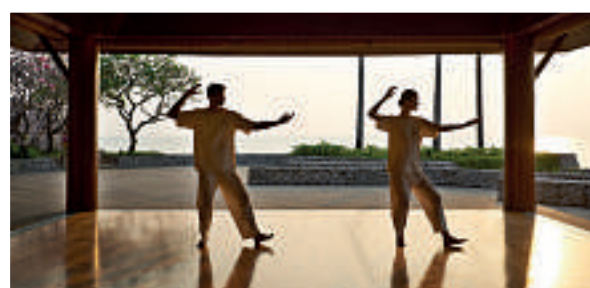
The joy of Chiva-Som comes from the charm of all who work there; their absolute expertise and the intuitive thinking behind everything they do, or recommend for a guest.





As a qualified nutritional therapist, I wasn't expecting much from my consultation with the naturopath, but how wrong I was. Rather than send me to someone who'd cover me in essential oils and give me recipes with kale, my assessor matched me with a guy called Tal, who was highly science-based, and who managed to help me completely reframe my thinking. I walked in saying, "I want to learn consistency"; I left with tools to help me use my crazy, difficult "all or nothing" personality to its best advantages. It's a much happier space, and I'm incredibly grateful.

Meals are a highlight, enjoyed overlooking the beach and pool, or in the more formal Emerald Room; each is a multi-course extravaganza, so packed with flavour, you forget you're consuming a pittance of calories. The variety of soups, salads, Thai curries and fruity treats make you wonder, why not always just eat like this? (And yes, the recipe book is available for sale.) As for The Irish Question... The answer is yes, wine and champagne





The Siam Hotel in Bangkok

can be enjoyed in the library in the evening, but very few even consider it. Instead, the outstanding meals, juices, teas and healthy snacks are more than enough to satisfy, and yet keep guests gliding towards their wellness goals.

Chiva-Som is the most beautiful health clinic in the world. A village of little and larger pavilions in lush, tropical surroundings, surrounded by water and colourful planting. At night, the squid boats twinkle off shore, while the clear skies fill with stars. If you need entertainment, there's the poshest night market about 300 metres from the front gate, filled with gorgeous jewellery and upmarket craft goods. There's also a Chiva-Som shuttle to downtown Hua Hin, past the royal winter palace. This is The Hamptons of Thailand.

And then the results speak for themselves – 80 per cent of guests return again and again. I fully intend to be in that number.

*Seven nights at Chiva-Som, from approx €5,070 per person, based on a couple sharing an Ocean room on a healthy full-board basis. Includes daily massage, spa credit, access to daily fitness classes, return international flights and private airport transfers, based on travel in October 2017. Contact Wellbeing Escapes on 0044 203 735 7555 for an exclusive offer with free spa credit. For more information, visit [chivasom.com](http://chivasom.com).*

## The Bangkok stayover

Most guests to Chiva-Som spend a night or two in Bangkok to combat jetlag... and have one last hurrah before wellness takes priority. We stayed at The Siam Hotel, which may be categorised as “boutique”, but it's so much more than that. Each of the 28 suites and ten villas are generously proportioned, overlooking private gardens, designed features and/or a view of Bangkok's Chao Phraya River. The same riverside frontage is a distinct advantage, as guests can avail of the hotel's luxury riverboat in an attempt to overcome the city's crazy traffic.

Hop on and enjoy a stunning bit of sightseeing en route to key piers connecting to the Skytrain.

The Siam Hotel, designed by Bangkok-based American super-architect Bill Bensley, fuses historic Thai culture and design with the coolest of modern touches, individuality and lavish innovation. Just as Francis Brennan has filled The Park Hotel in Kenmare with his favourite antiques and collectibles, so has The Siam's owners, the Sukosol family, who multi-task as a significant

musical dynasty. In addition to all the usual facilities you'd expect from a five-star-plus hotel, The Siam also boasts a resident, traditional Sak Yant tattoo artist, a Thai boxing (Muay Thai) trainer and ring, a screening room and a contemporary butler service for each guest, offering not only the best suggestions, but the sort of intuitive minding that goes beyond impressive (right down to the iPhone in every room with your butler on speed-dial, 24/7). Dining at The Siam is modern and delicious, with an afternoon tea that's fast developing a reputation.

After one night, I was hooked. Then, our butler, had recommended the coolest bar in Chinatown for our evening's entertainment, and furnished us with maps and directions, written in Thai and English. Breakfast was the perfect East-meets-West treat, and sunset cocktails on the terrace by the river had me feeling like a rockstar. The Siam has a gentle, but seductive sophistication that larger-scale city properties lose. Forgo the big chains and give this a go.

*Rooms at The Siam, Bangkok start from THB 17,971 (approx €450) per night based on two people sharing a Siam Suite on a B&B basis, excluding VAT and service charge. For reservations and bookings, contact +66 2206 6999 or email [reservations@thesiamhotel.com](mailto:reservations@thesiamhotel.com).*

## THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

Where does a holiday start? If you're flying Business or First Class with Emirates, it would be when the chauffeur-driven Mercedes pulls up outside your home to whisk you to, and through, Dublin Airport. And if returning on one of Emirates' A380 planes, the holiday carries through as you toast good times in the roomy bar serving complimentary champagne, cocktails and snacks as you glide through the skies. The whole “turn left” experience with Emirates is absolutely worth the indulgence. A lot has already been said about the

crew who work out of Dublin, but nothing prepared me for the fun of our cabin manager, who whipped out a portable karaoke microphone for us to inspect, for added lolz. Genuinely warm welcomes and attentive service match the superior meal service, the entertainment package on offer, and the amenities (and Voya products) for passengers – right down to the light mattress tucked on to the lie-flat seats to transform them into a proper bed. If luxury can be measured by experience, this one is absolutely worth the indulgence.

*Emirates flies all over the world from Dublin (twice daily), with excellent onward connections via Dubai. Business Class return flights to Bangkok cost from €2,861 inclusive of all taxes and charges and include chauffeur collection and return. See [emirates.ie](http://emirates.ie) for more or contact your travel agent.*

