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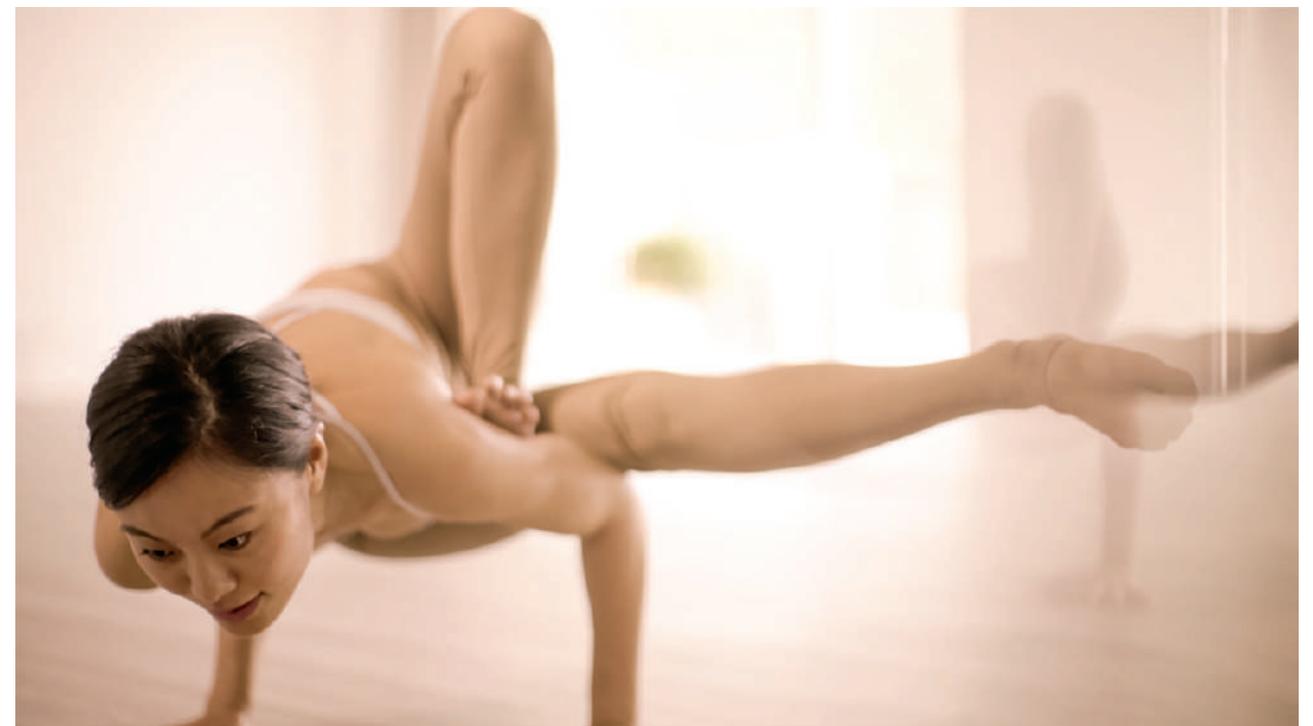
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A New Age of Spas

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COURTESY OF FIVELEMENTS

As a priority on wellness seeps into every corner of our lives, retreats you used to pay for just a relaxation recharge are upping their games. Spas in Asia are expanding their outlooks, incorporating radically new science and millennia-old beliefs, ancient acrobatics and musical acts, gurus who read your body-fat and those who plumb your soul. The keynote example of this is the revolutionary Sangha by Octave, in China, of which we'll have a first-look next month. In the meantime, as you read on here for some more of the most interesting ideas in spas today, get ready to sweat, salivate—and sometimes cringe. (Of course, if you just want an old-fashioned massage, not to worry, they've still got those, too.)



A Level Playing Field

You don't have to be an athlete to self-improve at Phuket's vegan-friendly sports resort.

BY BEK VAN VLIET OWEN

"I SAID 'DON'T KICK ME!'" It feels as if it's 500 degrees in the tropical shade and my roundhouses are steadily losing their roundness. On my second set of 20, it's a fitness miracle that I can kick anything at all. Sally, the *muay* Thai trainer who just copped my errant foot, is an angel of patience disguised as someone about to beat me up.

My noodle-limbed compatriots and I are 10 minutes from the end of what seems like a seven-hour *muay* Thai class. Our jaunty enthusiasm at

the start, getting our hands all bound up like real fighters, has long evaporated and become part of the humidity. As we paw at the bags, the final excruciating moments tick by, and after a *WELL DONE, COOL DOWN!* we limp around the mats, struggling to get our gloves off. We gasp at our water bottles. One of us lies down, feeling faint.

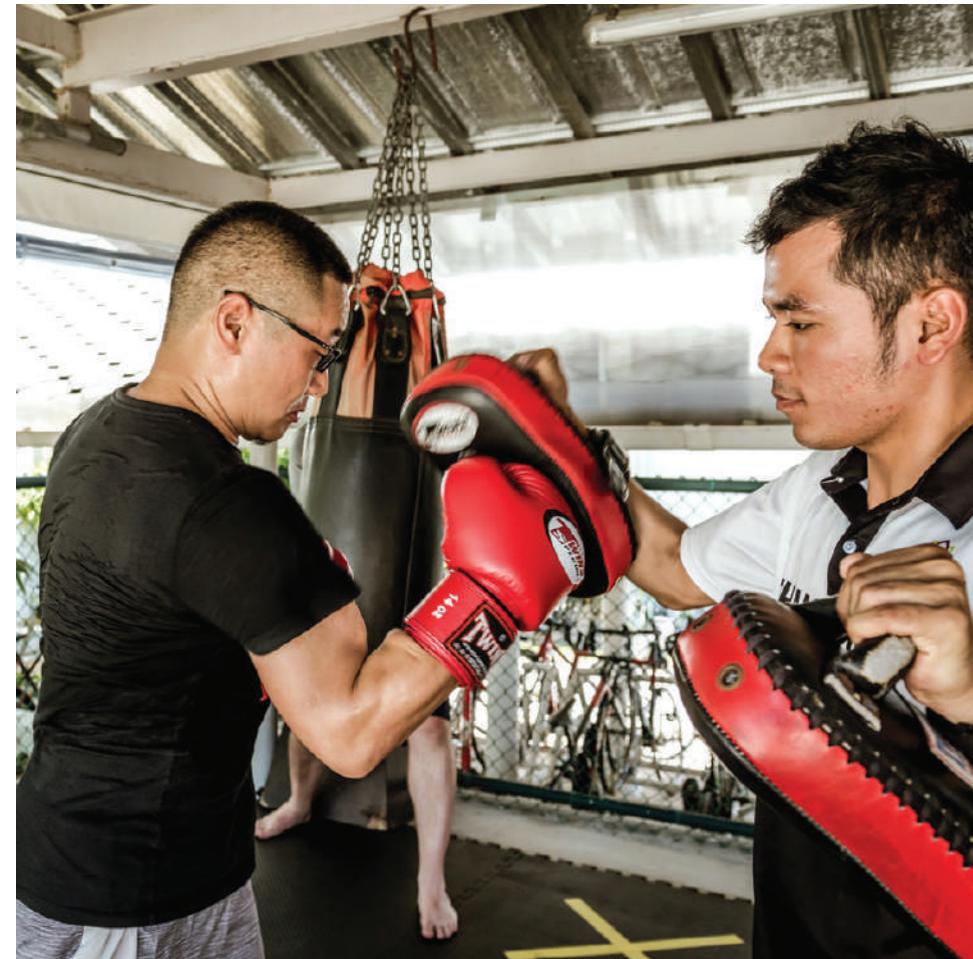
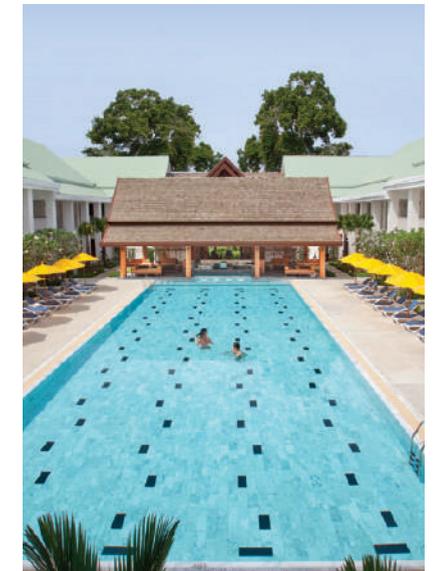
At Thanyapura Health and Sports Resort in Phuket, training, *ahem*, pulls no punches. This is where athletes come to improve their

Olympic times, or spend their Saturdays running along Phuket's precipitous slopes, or play soccer in the scorching midday sun. At any given moment, people are doing laps in the resort's Olympic-sized pool, strengthening their cores in the fitness studios, perfecting their backhands on the tennis courts or stretching the limits of human malleability in the yoga wing. The whole 23-hectare resort is geared toward this type of go-hard-or-go-home activity—so it's with some trepidation that our group of mildly active media people has come to try out some of the resort's new novice-friendly health offerings.

Around the lunch table after *muay* Thai we share the anxieties

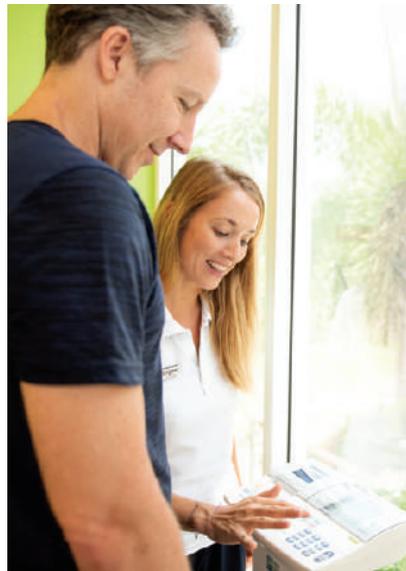
we'd had before arriving and decide they have been effectively quashed, or at least chased off by a gang of workout endorphins. Despite the sweat and tears of the last 60 minutes, we're feeling good—at ease amid the athletes. We've discovered that the "layman's" programs here cover such a wide range of wellness activities that there's plenty for casuals like us to enjoy, be it a fitness reboot, detox weekend, yoga workshop or even delicious vegan cooking classes.

The latter is not as far-fetched an idea as I would have thought before getting here, because while none of us is vegan, we're rapt with the bounty of organic, plant-based dishes we've been eating. We



THIS SPREAD: COURTESY OF THANYAPURA HEALTH AND SPORTS RESORT

FROM TOP: Holistic head chef Jamie Raftery; the resort wing's pool; *muay* Thai at the resort's outdoor ring.



FROM TOP: Nutritionist Morgane works the Tanita scales; organic vegan fare; downward dog practice. OPPOSITE: The resort's two training pools.

interrupt our lunch chatter time and time again to praise each dish: creamy, peanut-y *massaman* tempeh; tofu *pad* Thai; coconut (and crack?)-laced quinoa; Moroccan millet salad; miso soup; *tom kha* mushroom—each one a winner. It's all from the menu of the resort's vegan restaurant, DiVine, whose recipes are devised by executive chef Jamie Raftery, who is himself not vegan. Thanyapura is similarly flexitarian—you'll find meaty pizzas, buttery croissants and eggy omelets aplenty—but many of the trainers and specialists here are active champions of a plant-based diet. Fun fact: the day we arrived, Thanyapura brand ambassador Rebecca Frith launched her *Legends of Change* book, a collection of “inspiring true stories from vegan women.” Extra-fun fact: Heather Mills, celebrity philanthropist and vocal vegan woman, spoke at the event and had decided to stay all week.

After lunch there's a conundrum. What to do? We can: swim in one of three pools; join a group fitness class from the daily schedule; hang out on the poolside terrace of Booster café *a la* Heather; or head to our rooms for a nap. The scale tipper: this morning we were up early meditating in the gardens with velvet-voiced “mind trainer” Pierre, so most of us feel we have earned a rest. My room in the hillside Garden Wing has a small terrace with potted plants and a lush outlook, but it's the gargantuan king bed that calls. I drift off, aglow with a weird sense of self-satisfaction, like I alone have unlocked elusive secrets to good health.

STARING DOWN the barrel of a body composition session, I'm feeling decidedly less smug. We've all been dreading this particular part of the weekend, since it involves the inarguable fundamentals of water, muscle and fat. After standing on the



THIS SPREAD: COURTESY OF THANYAPURA HEALTH AND SPORTS RESORT (3); COURTESY OF STRIP; MINISTRY OF WAXING

Tanita scales, we sit around a conference table in one of Thanyapura's meeting spaces, awaiting our 'scores.' Resident nutritionist Morgane Quinchon hands each of us our reports and we read them gravely, as if they are telegrams from the frontline. Morgane spends the next hour running through each of the datasets so that we understand what they mean—*this is your body-fat percentage, this is the ideal range, this is what your bones weigh, here's your metabolic age*—number values on all those late-night burgers and happy hours. She recommends a body composition scan every month if you're on a program to shift your numbers around.

Most of us around the table could benefit from a fitness or nutrition package, some from a weight-loss program, others from weight training and all of us, we agree, from a package called 'De-Stress Your Life.' While none of us has time for a longer regimen (some run up to 21 nights), we all think another weekend stay at the resort, to pick-and-mix group classes and health

assessments, and just take a break from our respective big cities, is something we could fit into our lives. In particular there's a three-hour Thanyapura Health 360 package with heavy-metals testing that sounds, if not exactly appealing, then a worthwhile investment in wellbeing for city folk.

After Hatha yoga with a mountain view, a sports science demonstration and more organic eating, there's only one thing left on the agenda: a signature massage at the resort's spa. Prone on the table, sore roundhouse muscles being pulverized, I think I wouldn't mind coming back for the 360 scan. And to see what I can do to stave off every sign of aging (part of the onsite aesthetics team's purview). Perhaps to learn how make that quinoa-crack dish. And definitely to work on my *muay* Thai moves, and try to get on Sally's good side.

thanyapura.com; doubles from Bt4,060; sports membership Bt32,000 per year; De-Stress Your Life from Bt53,243 for seven nights; Thanyapura Health 360 for Bt9,500.

LET IT BLOOM

Strip: Ministry of Waxing, the spa chain that ignited the Brazilian wax fad in Singapore has a new, er, stimulating ritual: Rosebud Vajuveneration (*strip.com.sg; S\$250; S\$2,500 for eight*), a non-invasive vulva care procedure that promises to tighten, lift and firm a woman's labia in 30 minutes. The therapist first slathers a thin layer of cream on your Brazilian area before rolling a “Thermal O2” applicator that combines radio frequency, vacuum suction and heat to reduce fine lines, firm sagging skin and enhance blood and lymph circulation for increased cell metabolism. The final flourish is a cool, hydrating mask to moisturize the area for a plump, supple finish. — GRACE MA



The Jumping Off Point

An inner-oriented Keksel Yoga retreat asks, Who is doing the thinking? Don't be surprised when the answer is, Duck drinking water. BY DAVEN WU

Chaphur Rinpoche leads Aman's Keksel Yoga retreats. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: A Pool suite at Amantaka; bedrooms cosset guests in luxury.

"WHERE IS YOUR MIND?" asks the venerable Geshe Chaphur Rinpoche. The tenor notes in his voice are inflected with an unmistakable Tibetan timbre that drifts through the gloom in the room. In its wake, I feel myself sinking into his words. "Control the mind and you control the anger. Empty the mind, so that in that emptiness, there is no anger, only light and clarity."

Yessir, I think. That's exactly why I'm here.

Along with four others in this six-day Keksel Yoga retreat, I am sitting on the cool stone floor of the Buddhist Learning Centre, a quiet high-ceilinged room within the grounds of Amantaka—Aman's 24-suite Laotian jewel in peaceful Luang Prabang. The tall green windows are shuttered against the

fierce sun and the air in here is scented with incense infused with juniper leaves and water from a lake near sacred Mount Kailash.

A little limp from the strenuous yoga postures he's just put us through, I sit and try to catch my breath and listen to that voice. Just about everything the Rinpoche—who is descended from one of the six principal high lama lineages in Tibet—says is a quotable sound bite, a toothsome nugget of wisdom that would be equally profound in an Instagram meme or on a T-shirt. "If there is no self, there is no problem." "The north facing cave gets no light." "If there are too many clouds, the sun cannot be seen."

From the very first moment we entered this room, it was clear that Keksel Yoga, this most ancient of

Tibetan disciplines, was unlike anything any of us had ever done. It's taken a few days of head-scratching and mental gymnastics to grasp slippery metaphysical concepts—"Who is doing the thinking?"—but I think I've come to a tenuous understanding.

At Keksel's core is Dzogchen, which, in the simplest of terms, is the process of looking inwards. The idea is that everything we need to achieve enlightenment can be found within ourselves. There is no need to look to external sources. Inner awareness is the alpha and the omega of the spiritual process.

In turn, Keksel Yoga is—alongside a songbook of complex mantras, visualization and breath work—a series of physical movements that have been conceived and refined by the Tibetan lamas over millennia to facilitate the attainment of Dzogchen.

But here's the thing: though the word "yoga" is attached, Keksel bears almost no resemblance to the Iyengar or Hatha yoga with which most of us are familiar. For starters, its 40 postures—each evocatively named, like "Duck drinking water," "Donkey sleeping," "Hawk holding



THIS SPREAD: COURTESY OF AMAN



its breath" and "Wild yak nudging"—involve long stretches of breath holding and almost gymnastics-like body contortions. We're taught only five of the simplest postures, which require us to twist and sway and stretch. "They get progressively harder," the Rinpoche assures us. "The thirty-second to fortieth are almost like flying!"

Earlier, in my suite, I'd watched a YouTube clip of an elderly Keksel practitioner repeatedly jump into the air and while airborne, fold his legs into the lotus and land, in that position, on the floor with a resounding thump. As it is, our five simple postures, when strung together in a Vinyasa-type flow, leave us panting and red in the face, while the Rinpoche looks like he's just had a deep-tissue massage. He smiles beatifically. "In the monastery, we can do all forty postures in about fifteen to twenty minutes. It's like a HIIT class!"

He demonstrates one of the more advanced postures—a variation on the one in the YouTube clip—in which he twists his legs into the lotus position and then, very casually, thrusts both arms back and with a sharp expulsion of air, propels himself, fully seated, a foot off the ground. "People say we're flying, but really we're just jumping!" he explains cheerfully.

I am gobsmacked by the demonstration. What's more, sedentary habits of a lifetime have taken their toll, leaving me a little concussed by the daily schedule of morning meditation, two 90-minute Keksel sessions, and post-dinner mantra chanting and meditation.

Even more challenging is that Amantaka sadistically pulls out all the stops to test the progress of our spiritual detachment, including staging leisurely lunches of local curries and sticky rice in its shaded colonnades, and leaving cool towels



Mantras for inner peace.

by the capacious dark-tiled pool, all with whisper-quiet service. “Would you like us to draw a hot bath for you for after your evening meditation?” I’m asked. Contentment floods me. *Yes, please.*

But is that the right answer? One of the central tenets of Keksel is that we must train our mind to understand that whatever we currently have is always enough. And one evening, sitting in my darkened room, cossetted by luxury and inhaling incense infused with Tibetan herbs, I breathe deeply and chant a mantra to clear and focus the mind on its inherent essence.

I am suddenly aware of a thought, skating just below my mind’s surface: it’s the realization that I am happy and blessed to be here at this point in time and in this place whose very name, Amantaka, is a portmanteau of *aman*, the Sanskrit word for peace, and Tipitaka, a reference to the teachings of the Buddha. And it’s more than enough.

aman.com; Chapur Rinpoche will lead Keksel Yoga retreats at Amantaka May 31–June 7 and August 30–September 6, and at Amanoi in Vietnam June 10–16 and September 8–14; prices available on request but, as a guide, the 2019 rates started at US\$1,800 per night.

ZODIAC ZEAL

These days, it’s good to follow your signs. Spas are tapping into everything from planetary directions to Zodiac signs and the traditional five elements of earth, fire, water, wood and metal in their new bespoke treatments. On the Cam Ranh coast, **The Anam** has created the Vietnamese Zodiac Spa Package (*theanam.com*; VND3,000,000) that takes your birth year and its corresponding Vietnamese zodiac element to create a treatment plan that balances the body, mind and soul. For example, individuals of the Horse-Wood combination are apparently prone to high stress levels and would be

given a bamboo massage and a cleansing coffee scrub with rosemary essential oil and aloe vera tea for a relaxing experience. **Sangha Retreat’s** Wu Xin treatment (*sangharettreat.com*; RMB1,400) assesses which element channel is blocked, and stimulates it using circular thumb pressure in long movements along the body and limbs to restore balance. At **Fairmont Jaipur’s** Ruhab Spa, its Horo Spa treatments (*fairmont.com*; Rs6,500) delve into a guest’s zodiac sign and *dosha* energy centers to determine the healing remedies to prescribe. — G.M.



Ruhab Spa, Fairmont Jaipur.



Saving Energy

Heal thyself down on the southern tip of Uluwatu, where a whole resort is a spa of sorts, and the spa is anything you want it to be. BY JENINNE LEE-ST. JOHN

At Six Senses, layers of pools over the ocean elevate the meaning of “taking to the waters.”

FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE said to have power over the weather, I Made Warmana and his wife, Tri Hatmani Nugrahaningsih, seem remarkably normal. Titin Sulistiyowati, experiences manager at Six Senses Uluwatu, had told me that she calls them in to clear the skies when it looks like rain in advance of a wedding—praying, placing offerings around the resort’s temples, and fasting and meditating so as to clean their own souls while asking assistance from God. “I know it sounds unbelievable,” she confided, “but it works.” *How do you change the science of the Earth?*, I wondered. “It does not stop the rain,” she

replied. “They are helping to push the rain clouds and rain away from us, who do not need it, to other places that need it more.” That was a comforting thought, especially with the cataclysmic wildfires that were at the time of my visit eating their way through Indonesia.

So, if they’re good enough for the gods of rain, they’re good enough for me. Pak Warmana and Mrs. Tri are skilled in traditional Balinese healing methods such as prana (passed down from his father), and Reiki, or energy healing. Pak Warmana has helped 1,297 people become Reiki practitioners and countless others have come for

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF AMAN; COURTESY OF FAIRMONT

COURTESY OF SIX SENSES

therapy. The effects, he says, depend on how much negative energy a person has: “In one treatment, someone can be healed, or their energy is balanced already and the good energy can last for some period of time. This depends on the thoughts, food intake and the situation one is dealing with.” Since a trip to Bali isn’t complete without a session with a wellness guru, Titin has kindly brokered a meeting.

You might expect Six Senses to make their Bali debut up in wellbeing magnet Ubud, but the dramatic cliffs of Uluwatu make a pretty good setting for mindfulness. The whole resort—every villa, suite and public space—is oriented towards the southward sea, vast and empty in all directions, save the turtles you can clearly see swimming along about 50 meters offshore. When I realize that we’ve barely spotted any fishing

boats, though, I begin to see how comforting I usually find them: their green and white lights might be claustrophobia-inducing, hemming in the horizon at night, but they also act as a mental safety net, like an atoll reef, a ring around the known world. Without them, with the dark, white-capped water bleeding into the inky, star-speckled sky, I find myself contemplating endlessness—What if someone dropped me way out in those waters? Is this what the end of the world feels like? Which way is up?

It’s enough to do your head in. Luckily, the brand is practically built to help you answer—or avoid—such existential questions in your own time. Their concept of integrated wellness is about finding easily adjusted elements throughout your personal universe that fit into your natural flow and improve health and

happiness. You might say that to Six Senses, all the world’s a spa.

Those concerned with the seasonality and sourcing of their food can get their hands dirty in the organic garden that supplies produce and eggs to the three restaurants. Here, I pop into the mushroom hut, look in on the chickens, and meet the two resident goats, Pho and Bo (named for Vietnamese beef noodle soup). After being here for only two months, they are already expecting a kid. “I guess they got bored,” Titin jokes. “There are only two of them.” Cliff-side, there is an open-air movie theater where the nightly film soundtrack is underscored by waves crashing below and the onscreen action has serious competition from the stars ablaze overhead. Unlike any other Six Senses in the world, this one has a staggering five wedding venues, all facing that

COURTESY OF SIX SENSES (2)

boundless horizon, a fitting place to make promises of eternity.

But the heart and soul of the property is the 10-treatment-room spa, a series of buildings clustered like a stilted village along walkways above water features to maximize feng shui. There’s a greenery draped aqua-pressure pool, where a lattice roof to shield the sun throws the most beautiful patterns across the water and the plants. Yogic cleanses show you how to wiggle out the toxins; book a sleep upgrade, and special in-room gadgets and comforts are supplemented by relaxing spa treatments, yoga and meditations; the “full potential” program just asks you what you want to be and then gins up the physical and spiritual paths to get there (including customized menus).

I’m looking to calm my restlessness by pushing my own boundaries. So, I’ve been scheduled lessons with Aloha Bali Surf—during my second one at soft-coral-carpeted Padang Padang break, a manatee swims right past my board, twice, and a turtle too, giving me a sense of place on this horizon and recharging my energy after a wipe-out. I have a Kun Ye massage, a Tibetan-derived combo I’ve never heard of that meshes crystals and herbal poultices with acupressure and hand-cupping. And I have that appointment with Pak Warmana. I’d been told people weep during this process, but I just come out of it feeling lighter, mentally and physically, like after a great gong bath. “His skills and willingness to help and heal people are extraordinary,” Titin told me. “It is a rare find in this very materialistic world.” Indeed, a month later, I receive an Instagram DM from Pak Warmana just checking in on me and my energy.

The aerial yoga lesson here with Ivan Lumenta is the most challenging I’ve ever had—which is saying a lot considering one time I was suffering from an epically ill-timed hangover. Perhaps it’s partly



LOCUST POCUS

When it comes to reviving dull and limp hair, harnessing the forces of nature is the way to go, according to Vietnamese women. Le Spa at **Azerai La Residence, Hue** offers a 60-minute Traditional Hair Wash treatment (azerai.com; VND800,000) using an ancient remedy that consists of locust, lemongrass and pandan leaf—a centuries-old concoction created to eliminate dandruff, prevent hair loss and stimulate hair growth. The results are worth it: super silky, shiny locks that glisten from within. — G.M.

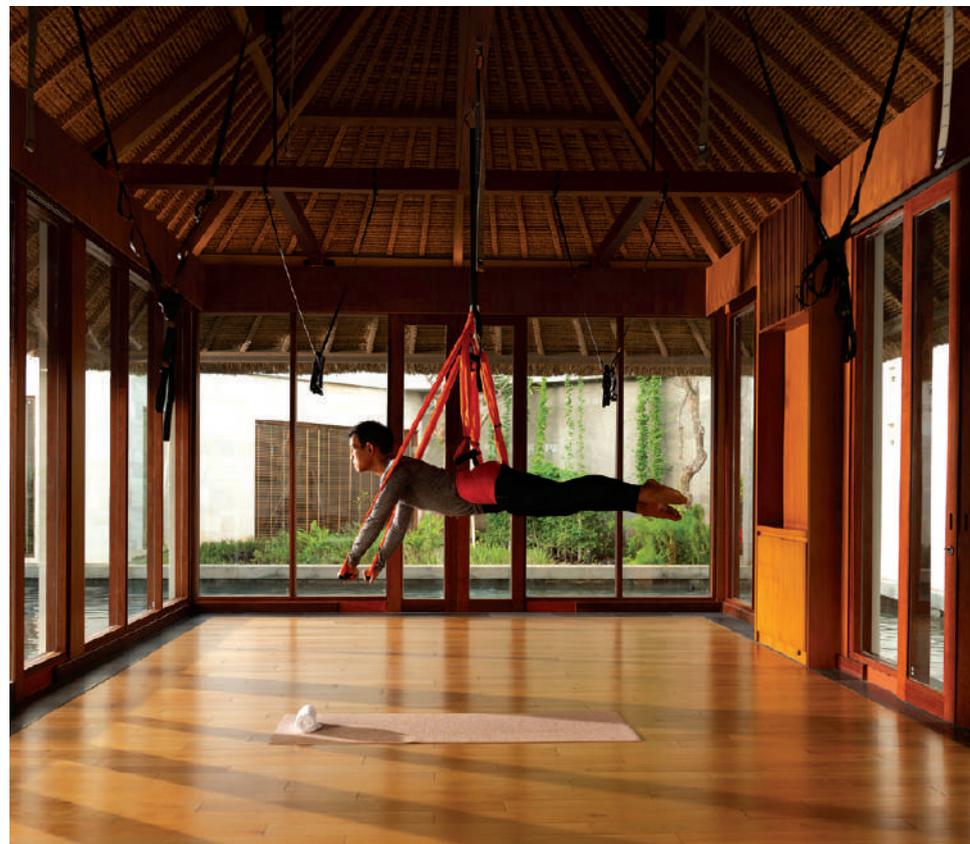
because his sequence seems like a natural but cumulative flow, and partly because my friend and I had told him we weren’t beginners and wanted a challenge. The version of “Superman” we did was basically plank in the air. It might look like nuts-o acrobatics, but anti-gravity yoga is really about calming your mind enough to trust yourself, Ivan tells us as we put it all into our biceps. Have a little faith and you’re not going to fall.

As we get into “chandelier”—upside down, bend one knee in half lotus, grasp the other ankle with both hands behind our arched backs—my core thinks, *no way*. But the hammock holds and the tension flits away. Hanging upside down in a glass-walled room, I feel like an exceptionally talented parakeet, little birds known to spend a lot of time inverted once they feel comfortable in their new homes. There’s more than one way to make the negative energy flow out of you.

sixsenses.com; doubles from Rp11,564,050; aerial yoga from Rp1,400,000; private surf lessons Rp1,300,000; Kun Ye massage Rp2,600,000; healing session with Pak Warmana Rp1,500,000.



FROM LEFT: Fresh and creative local fare at Six Senses, like a cold-smoked and cured catch-of-the-day tostada; “Superman” flies in aerial yoga class. OPPOSITE: The hotel’s temple.



FROM LEFT: JENNINE LEE-ST. JOHN; COURTESY OF AZERAI LA RESIDENCE

Urban Renewal

Find rainforest therapies in the urban jungle at a new, wildly inclusive retreat that brings plant-forward food and treatments to the heart of Hong Kong. BY JANICE LEUNG HAYES

Classes at Fivelements include sacred sound chanting meditation, Taoist movement, and power in inversions.

CAUSEWAY BAY, one of Hong Kong's busiest shopping districts, doesn't usually come to mind in the search for inner peace, but on a recent day in an unexpected corner of the hectic Times Square mall, I stepped off an escalator into a parallel universe decidedly kinder, softer and more mindful. Amid eco-conscious natural materials, perusing a plant-based menu inspired by the cuisines of Asia while waiting for a body treatment dubbed Treasures From Earth, I realized that being a cocoon in the eye of the storm is precisely Fivelements Habitat's raison d'être.

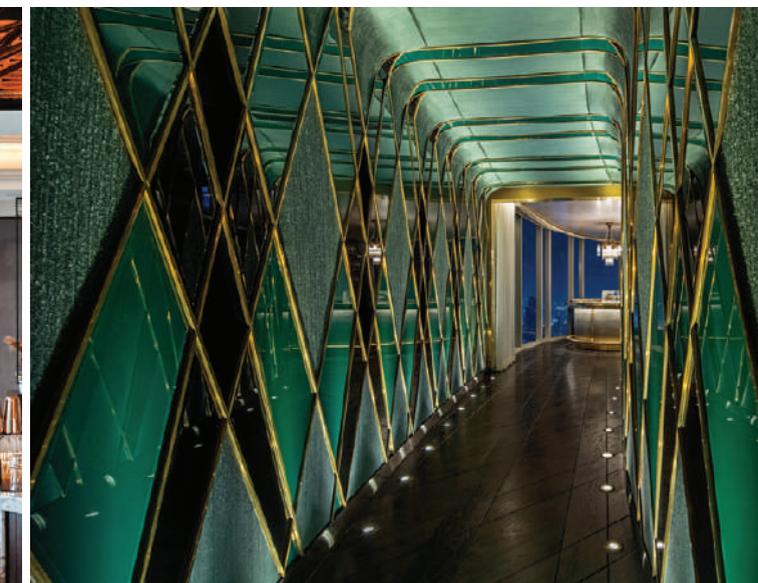
Fivelements Habitat, the first urban outpost of a multi-award-winning flagship retreat in Bali, opened in July 2019 as a sanctuary of integrative wellness—spa, plant-based cuisine, yoga and other as “sacred arts” ranging from self-guided soundscape meditation to barre—bringing their signature, positive, life-affirming, nature-led

practices to a city environment. For a long time, central Hong Kong—dwellers had to seek respite in secluded, far-away retreats, but now these philosophies are where they are needed the most. Memberships are available, granting free access to the more than 100 scheduled classes per week, as well as discounts for spa and dining. But anyone can visit and choose from the full range of offerings, be it an energizing breakfast, a facial or a *wing chun* martial arts session.

I was here for the Fivelements Signature Day, which includes a body treatment, a three-course lunch at their restaurant, Sakti Elixir Bar, and a facial. Philosophies centered on oneself and nature are brought to life in the smallest details, from the copper jugs and tubs for my footbath, to the crystals in the drinking-water pitchers. My therapist for the day, Astha, invited me to briefly ▶



COURTESY OF FIVELEMENTS



Crowning Jewels

Whether you need a full evening's fantastic agenda or a just few special hours, Bull & Bear steakhouse, The Loft and The Champagne Bar shine bright like three diamonds above Bangkok.

CALLING THE GLITTERATI. There's a gilded perch for you up in the clouds above the City of Angels. Actually, three perches: the jewels in the crown of the Waldorf Astoria Bangkok, a trifecta of our favorite dining-drinking-entertainment spots connected by a dazzling spiraling staircase Gatsby himself (and certainly all your IG followers) would've envied.

With its live raw bar serving up classic New York class on ice, and custom-made grill turning out palate-piquing steaks and the best Atlantic lobsters in town, it's hard for Bull & Bear not to throw its weight around. Settle into a banquette in the sultry dining room where the Wall Street icons share the spotlight with the dueling mythological Naga and Garuda, survey the city over your dry-aged Wagyu: you're a master, or mistress, of the universe.

Bangkok puts on a stellar sunset, and the best place to catch the show is The Loft, a classed-up

throwback to those cavernous artists' residences in Soho. Gazing out its floor-to-ceiling windows, a Habanero Whiskey Punch in hand, we always feel like the magenta and tangerine sky was painted a watercolor mural just for us. After dark, the bar is abuzz with the diamonds and pearls of the city's social scene.

But if you're looking for divine effervescence, ascend to the uppermost floor to The Champagne Bar. Part speakeasy, part sexy boudoir, this glam temple to bubbly seduces with its Art Nouveau aesthetic and its tasting trove of champagnes and whiskies. It's the only way we want to end the night.

With their next-level cool, the jewels in the crown have a devoted fanbase of smart, sophisticated regulars—perhaps the highest recommendation we can convey to this set of hot spots that has you sparkling above brilliant Bangkok and yet fully at one with it.



Plant-based menus at Sakti, the Fivelements in-house restaurant.

meditate and take a few deep breaths with her, for increased mindfulness.

She then applied a full-body turmeric scrub, to kickstart the detox process, followed by a mask of volcanic mud—which I kept on in the adjoining steam room, where the mud sunk into my pores, drawing out impurities. After a shower, I laid back down for a massage using the spa’s signature oil with ylang ylang and patchouli, said to promote relaxation and reduce water retention. As my knots were being undone, I felt myself sink into the treatment bed, not realizing I had actually fallen asleep until Astha gently woke me, offering a turmeric and coconut water before lunch.

Like the original in Ubud, the café at Fivelements in Hong Kong uses vegan ingredients mostly sourced from organic farms. The menus are refreshed often, but whatever the season, the idea is to leave you feeling rejuvenated and nourished in a way that is good for you and the planet. I enjoyed a flavorful kale and moringa salad, *idli* (south Indian steamed rice cake) with a mild, turmeric-rich curry, and a light, silky coconut pudding that might convince even the most ardent dairy-lover to give up panna cotta. As someone who writes about food for a living, I appreciated that the food at Sakti was not only

nutrient dense, but was made with the pleasure of eating in mind.

As I was making a mental note to come back to try the rest of menu, Astha arrived to collect me to begin our afternoon portion: the Habitat Superfood Facial. “Do you like seaweed?” she asked. She explained that spirulina’s antioxidants would help with signs of aging, oatmeal would nourish while gently exfoliating, cucumber would refresh my tired eyes and keep wrinkles at bay, and honey would keep my lips moisturized. The edible ingredients were complemented by Aromatherapy Associates organic products.

A day of spa treatments is often described as pampering—something luxurious, even superfluous. But Fivelements’ nature-centered approach makes you realize that it’s part of responsible self-care to slow down and connect with yourself and the environment, because after all, our wellbeing is intertwined. I left this little sanctuary calm but energized, safe in the knowledge that I don’t have to fly off to the rainforest to experience it again.

fivelements.com; memberships from HK\$1,188 per month, including free access to regularly scheduled classes, and discounts for spa and dining; Signature Day HK\$3,000. ►

GEE, IT'S GHEE

Located at the foot of the Himalayas in northern India, **Ananda Spa's** Tarpana treatment (anandaspa.com; Rs3,500) uses ghee to revive tired eyes and treat other eye disorders. Lie on the *droni* table while a ring of flour paste is shaped around your eyes. Medicated ghee is then poured slowly through the ring until a certain level where your eyes can open and close for five-minute periods.

— G.M.



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF FIVELEMENTS; COURTESY OF ANANDA SPA

W KOH SAMUI

Plan your next summer holiday and celebrate the day and night in style with a 3-night stay in the private pool villa from THB 13,750* a night when booking the hotel’s **Escape Offer**.

Enjoy roundtrip airport transfers, daily cocktail at Koh Samui’s iconic WOOBAR®, nightly dinner at The Kitchen Table, plus an exclusive dinner at the contemporary Japanese restaurant, Namu, and a Thai massage for two persons.



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*Subject to 18.7% vats and service charge





Cello Concerto,
The Ritz-Carlton Spa.

Strung Out

A trip to the spa meets live classical music in a harmonious treatment at The Ritz-Carlton Millenia Singapore.

BY CHRISTOPHER KUCWAY

I ARRIVED AT the spa armed with a healthy dose of skepticism—the 60-minute Cello Concerta treatment I was about to try seemed a lot like a marketing gimmick. To help ward off my cynicism, I told myself that it was really no different from a four-hand massage, even though two of those hands would be playing a cello in the corner of the room.

Once settled in for the personal concert/massage—ESPA oils, room temps, massage pressure and comfort levels aligned—I still wasn't exactly sure what to expect, except that, after a week of meetings in Singapore, I would nod off for 60 minutes. Wrong. Instead, I found myself in a semi-comatose state to the strains of Mozart and Debussy, the cellist in sync with every move of my masseuse.

Kneading the length of my arm in a single stroke, the cellist's play

followed suit, stretching out a note to exactly match the masseuse's pressure. I'd become a living metronome. Staccato plucks of the cello's strings mirrored the sharp, deep-tissue jabs of an elbow along my back. The music's tempo matched the massage strokes note for note—this was accelerando as applied to an oil massage. It eventually seemed so natural that I wondered how I'd do without the live accompaniment in the future.

After the hour-long recital, the Cello Concerto package includes 30 minutes in the spa's steam room, sauna or whirlpool. I gladly took up the offer to decompress a little bit more, but quickly found my mind wandering to what was in my Yo Yo Ma vinyl collection at home. 🎻

ritzcarlton.com; S\$480 for one person, S\$720 for two.

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