



REVAMPED

CHIVA-SOM

WEIGHT
LOSS

HUA HIN, THAILAND

AFTER A FULL-ON REDESIGN THE WELLNESS INSTITUTION IS BETTER THAN EVER

This is the undisputed grande dame of spas. Over the past 24 years, it has won more awards than its rivals have had hot, cold or carb-free dinners. The retreat will no doubt need to extend its trophy cabinet even further later this year once its phased £18million renovation is finally completed. Arguably, though, the most exciting changes have already been unveiled. Last November the fitness centre was expanded, with an on-trend functional gym and workout spaces with floors as springy as a ballroom. There is also a new Re-functional Studio, with equipment to measure muscles and mobility, and a wireless EMS system for exercise routines that are gentle on the joints. It's a clever move because, not only does this fresh direction appeal to the spa's loyal fanbase of baby boomers anxious to stay active for as long as possible, it also plays to one of Chiva-Som's greatest strengths: the excellent physiotherapy department. Its team of 12 laser-eyed experts regularly wave a magic wand over the injuries of guests who had despaired of ever being pain-free again. The 13 personal trainers are equally impressive, squeezing every last ounce of energy from you in classes that run from high-intensity metafit to the ingenious gyrokinesis, a yoga-pose-meets-pole-dancing routine that works wonders on bad posture. The atmosphere switches to zen elsewhere. Before the refurb, nobody would linger in the Orchid Lounge, which had all the allure of a sixth-form common room. Reimagined by master of understated elegance Ed Tuttle and his team, it has become a stylish space of mosaic mirror panels, white orchids and low sofas in soft-wash silks. The last of the 54 bedrooms have also been transformed into light, contemporary havens, with sustainable teak and bamboo finishes.

LASER-EYED PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IMPRESSIVELY DEAL WITH THE INJURIES OF GUESTS WHO HAD DESPAIRED OF EVER BEING PAIN-FREE

Thankfully, some things haven't changed. The food is still exceptionally good. Initially you might sulk at the thought of just 1,200 calories a day but, with chocolate buckwheat pancakes and seabass with citrus sauce and homegrown organic vegetables on the menu, you'll soon cheer up, particularly when you jump on the scales. Service is stellar, as is the communication between departments – team members are always bang up-to-date on your progress – and, most commendably, management really listen; despite having installed a hypoxic training chamber at considerable expense a couple of years ago,

after unfavourable guest feedback it was ripped out. In May, the whole place will close for another six months so the seafront restaurant and spa zone can have their facelifts, completing the final stage of future-proofing. Innovation

has always been central to Chiva-Som's ethos and one of the reasons why so many return (the current record is 90 visits), so expect interesting additions this autumn. Until then, there are the new results-driven longevity consultations with anti-ageing expert Dr Pijak Wongvisit, and the more whimsical back-scratching massage – yes really, with fingers. Though we're not sure the latter will stand the test of time quite as well as Chiva-Som itself.

INSIDER TIP Avoid the complimentary skincare analysis. In reality, it's a fairly hard sell for the medi-spa's nip-and-tuck services.

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