



MANDARIN ORIENTAL, BANGKOK THAILAND

TIP-TOP INSTITUTION WITH A THRILLING NEW SPIN

Of all the spa stopovers in all the Asian capitals, it's wildly impressive that the Mandarin Oriental still flies the flag as a constantly evolving and utterly relevant place. For 142 years, the hotel has reigned the Chao Phraya waterfront, overseeing its rise from a humble port to one of the world's most intriguing and energetic cities. The key to its enduring grace and appeal lies in its counterintuitive thinking and foresight, keeping its guests returning again and again. These days, the Oriental is at the helm of another revival: Bangkok's Creative District, a mix of vintage warehouses-turned-art-galleries and bohemian bars that is revving up the riverside scene. The Chao Phraya's rally comes on the heels of the award-winning Oriental Spa's 25th anniversary and its launch of the Essence of Thailand, three new wellness treatments, made up of the Lanna Ceremony, the Spirit of Isaan and the Thai Warrior Massage. 'The outside cannot exist without the inside,' says Neelam Khatri, the resident yogi and mindfulness guru. Aligning the inner and outer to create a balanced whole is endemic in Thai culture – and these rituals blend ancient massage techniques with practices including meditation and yoga. Arriving for a treatment is its own journey. A Siamese teak barge ferries guests across the river to the atmospheric spa, a whitewashed colonial manor with frangipani curling through its mint-green shutters. Inside, the handsome rooms are dressed with a nod to provincial bungalows, a perfect backdrop for the pastorally inspired Lanna Ceremony. Lanna, the historic kingdom around Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, is known for its soulful, slow-living ethos. Foot-cleansing uses *bai miang*, locally grown tea leaves known for their antibacterial properties,

MANY THERAPISTS HAVE BEEN HERE FOR OVER A DECADE, THEIR TALENTS ARE SECOND NATURE AND THEIR INTUITIVENESS PERCOLATES THROUGHOUT

followed by a deep scrub with a green-tea mix, culminates with *tok sen*, wherein palm-sized tamarind-wood sticks tap tension and release jet-lag-blocked energy from the body's meridians. The Spirit of Isaan is a throwback to the village-based remedies used by Isaan rice farmers of north-eastern Thailand to ease the aches and pains of planting. After a warm, sticky rice, coffee and milk wrap, therapists knead muscles using lengths of smooth, heated bamboo, brilliant to wind down before bedtime. And the 90-minute Thai Warrior Massage takes warrior-like strength to endure, but it's worth it. The technique's dance-like flow combines *ruesi datton* (Thai hermit exercises), yoga, acupressure and stretching, and unknots plane-crunched bodies. Beyond the spa there are Mandarin Oriental's unique mindfulness meetings to reduce stress during business gatherings with guided meditation,

yoga, herbal tonics and digital detoxing. The Oriental places great value in the past. Most of the therapists have been here for over a decade, and their talents are second nature. It might not be seen as a

traditional destination spa for the mind, but this kind of intuitiveness percolates throughout, making every space a place to decompress. It's an oasis of calm in the hectic noise of Bangkok, and still at the very top of its game.

INSIDER TIP Don't skip the Spa Studio's Bastien Gonzalez signature *Pedi:Mani:Cure*, which uses modern medicine, beauty and healing therapies – and no nail polish – to make hands and feet soft, shiny and bright.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers three nights from £1,499 per person, including flights and transfers.