



**2020
WINNER**
BEST
DESTINATION
SPA

CHIVA-SOM HUA HIN, THAILAND

**WEIGHT
LOSS**

THE LEGEND GETS A SUPER-CHARGED REVAMP

This is the one of the original destination spas in Asia, the kind of one-stop, fix-all properties that brings together soul-soothing heat and sunshine with physically and emotionally nourishing therapies. Its meaningful message has resonated globally, inspiring a worldly crowd of guests to invest deeply – with time and money – into their health. The offering is almost overwhelming, knocking on more than 150 different treatments, from traditional Thai and Ayurvedic modalities and chakra balancing to naturopathic consultations. Then there's the perhaps surprising aesthetic-beauty department, plus serious remedial physiotherapy and rehabilitation, and the most prolific, high-profile roll-call of visiting therapists imaginable. No wonder David and Victoria Beckham, Kate Moss and Elle Macpherson have made numerous pilgrimages. The programmes are a fast track to tackling all sorts of health concerns, via both Eastern philosophies and Western practices. Arrive with repetitive shoulder pain and receive a plan that might include the Neurac method (a form of exercise using a specialised suspension frame to restore muscle

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function and movement) alongside balneotherapy, reflexology and deep-tissue massage. But after 25 years of fixing, restoring and recharging its guests, Chiva-Som needed a little TLC. What ensued was a slow-paced, considered but definitive upgrade, overseen by Krip Rojanastien, son of the founder. Spanning four years, it was a stop-start process, closing for six months at a time (re-opening each winter to a desperate clamour of guests) and costing about £20 million. The old magic remains, just now in shinier surroundings. Renowned designer Ed Tuttle has kept a sense of authenticity while bringing things gently up to speed with pale bamboo nudging out the dark teak, sun-bleached fabrics replacing dated shantung silks in plum, burgundy and forest green. It's not revolutionary, but the gentle lick of paint and the crispness of the lines has lifted everything. And far from being hard-edged and minimal, burnished-gold ceiling details bring movie-star lighting to the bedrooms. The redesigned bathing pavilion includes a new hydrotherapy pool and daybed area, the Niranlada Medi-Spa has had its slightly clinical styling softened, and the treatment rooms and flotation chamber have been zhuzhed. More dramatic changes took place in the Orchid Lounge, which got a total face lift. All of this regeneration and investment isn't the end of the story. Next up – by the end of this year – is the brand's second outpost, this time in Qatar. Rather than a repeat performance, Chiva-Som Zulaal will be trailblazing in its own right – the Middle East's first full-immersion wellness retreat. There, the focus will be on traditional Arabic integrative medicine, with a large part of the hotel also dedicated to families. If it's even half as good as its elder sibling, it will make huge waves in the spa world.

INSIDER TIP Don't expect an idyllic Thai beach scene – Hua Hin is over-developed with a snaggle of Seventies high-rises. But the hotel pool is lovely. **BOOK IT** Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.com/condenast) offers seven nights from £4,595 per person, full board, including flights, transfers, a consultation, one daily treatment and £625 wellness credit.

