

# Spa and Stay: A new Bangkok resort that follows the science



Chris Schalkx, 31 DECEMBER 2020

## Why go?

Don't let RAKxa's Bangkok address fool you. The city's skyline might be visible between the foliage, but the resort's location on an island in the Chao Phraya river places it far enough away to be free from the urban buzz.

Whether for post-surgery rehabilitation, fighting chronic fatigue or a lower back that won't stop aching, people come to this integrative medi-retreat to heal themselves with a melange of medical treatments and holistic therapies – all backed up by data-driven science. The proximity to the renowned Bumrungrad International Hospital (a highly involved founding partner) means that medical test results can be delivered swiftly.

## Where to hang out?

There are three treatment areas: slightly sterile-looking VitalLife is RAKxa's hi-tech wellness clinic, where stays start with doctor consultations, IV vitamin drips and anti-ageing treatments from medical machinery straight out of a sci-fi film.

There's RAKxa Gaya, a medical gym with athlete-grade equipment measuring every bone and muscle movement in minuscule detail to optimise workouts and rehabilitation. The lounge-lined lap pool in front hosts aqua fitness and there are yoga and Pilates studios for daily (free) group activities.



Teakwood-clad RAKxa Jai is the holistic healing centre. Here, the focus lies on Ayurvedic massages, Thai traditional medicine (with treatments that go beyond the typical Thai massage) and ancient Chinese techniques.

Guests hang out in the sex-segregated hydrotherapy suites between treatments. Overlooking a lagoon and Bangkok's skyline in the distance, it's a lovely spot to melt tensed-up muscles in the herbal steam room, vitality pool or infrared sauna.

### **Treatment menu**

This isn't the place for a quick fix. Most retreats start at five nights and go all the way up to 14 or more. Programmes are tailored to individual goals: there are workout-heavy weight management retreats; de-stress programs with Cryo sauna, sleep-inducing Ayurvedic oil massages and mindfulness sessions; and gut health programmes that include colonic hydrotherapy and crystal healing.



I came for the Immunity Booster package, but after an initial consultation and body analysis (part of every programme includes a blood test), my wellness adviser suggested I'd benefit more from a De-stress Retreat – I blame 2020. So I was hooked up to a Myers Cocktail IV drip followed by a Weber laser treatment, a tube injecting controlled beams of coloured light into my vein (to help increase melatonin production and reduce stress, I was told). I spent two sessions in a high-oxygen hyperbaric tube, half an hour under infrared light, and three minutes at -130C in the Cryo sauna. It's hard to pin down which session did the trick, but by the end of the second day I noticed my brain was much less foggy.

Between medical treatments, I had a Chi Nei Tsang massage that felt like a rearrangement of my guts and left me feeling energised, while the Ayurvedic Elakizhi treatment, an oil massage with herbal compresses, lulled me into a deep sleep I hadn't had in a while. I also had a one-on-one meditation workshop that taught me breathing techniques to continue de-stressing at home. I also left with a month's worth of supplements based on my blood results.

### **What's the vibe?**

While you might occasionally bump into a group of Hermès-clad girlfriends on a multi-day spa break, most guests come solo, with a clear wellness goal. The resort reflects that: green, calm and quiet, but far from uninspired. Interiors balance clean lines with rustic touches such as woven rattan and chunky earthenware to cover up the clinical looks, while the ever-helpful staff and therapists are chatty yet professional.



Food has a focus on clean and green CREDIT: LIFEDIE/LIFEDIE@HOTMAIL.COM

RAKxa's 60 villas make up a mini-village away from the treatment areas. All come with their own lush gardens, and some have private swimming pools and views over the lagoon. Inside, they're all similar: loads of beiges and browns and greys, Jim Thompson silk decor, and spacious double-vanity bathrooms with handlebar-equipped rain showers and low-slung bathtubs.

### What's to eat?

Unam restaurant, overlooking the river, serves up Mediterranean-tinged feel-good food with a focus on green and clean. Inflammation-causing ingredients such as sugar and dairy are banned, and most ingredients are organic, some from RAKxa's own farm.

Mornings start with a wheatgrass shot and gluten-free bread (with sweet potato, beetroot or carrot), plus a menu of Moroccan shakshuka, turmeric quinoa porridge or toasted sourdough topped with avocado or spinach. Lunch and dinner involve kombucha superfood salads (avocado, goji, edamame), vegetable soups and artful sugar-free chocolate mousse or fruit sorbets.

The kitchen and medical team are in sync about guests' dietary requirements, so my amino acid deficiency (one of the key results from my blood test) resulted in meat-heavy mains of herb-rubbed chicken breast or beef tenderloin with sunchoke purée.

Portions are large enough to avoid growling stomachs, and even my tablemate's detox diet, with fresh juices and soups, didn't look like gastronomic punishment. Next door, the RAKxa Cha tea lounge is where tea sommeliers blend brews to match guests' retreats; Osmanthus blends for an immune boost, or spearmint for an energy kick.

## **Money well spent?**

An introductory three-night programme starts at £6,517 and includes 14 selected treatments, accommodation, and meals. Seven-day detox and gut health retreats start at £11,875. RAKxa's slogan sums it up: Health is Wealth.

*Overseas holidays are currently subject to restrictions. Check the relevant Government advice before travelling.*