

VOGUE

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"I'm not
fascinated by
fame in isolation.
Everything I do has
to be meaningful"

Deepika

I N T E N T I O N S

Rakxa, a medical and wellness retreat like no other.

Food is medicine, and so is *movement, rest* and *connection*. Show up, *slow down* and chew your food instead of scrolling through a meal.

I went to a four-day wellness retreat and didn't have to do yoga once. That's it. That's the lede. Don't get me wrong, I love the practice. However at Rakxa Wellness & Medical Retreat, there's more. From cupping to colonics, cryo saunas and corrective exercise—you can save yoga for home. With the options for medical and holistic healing extending far beyond a *vinyasa* sesh, it's a biohackers paradise dressed in an elegant Thai accent.

Nestled on the river in Bangkok's 'green lung', the lush property opened during the pandemic and has fast become the region's hottest destination for health and revitalisation. Here, the potential for 'anti-ageing and rejuvenation seem endless. If you've ever fantasised about a total lifestyle makeover, Rakxa is the ultimate springboard.

Powered by VitalLife, a partner of the world-renowned Bumrungrad Hospital, each guest undergoes a hyper-personalised integrated treatment programme. Want to detox, improve mobility, heal your gut, lose weight, sleep better, metabolise stress or simply relax? There are programmes for that, starting from five days though some international guests have been known to stay for 20 or more.

Day One: The Connectedness Of Things

My session begins with a consultation with a seasoned doctor, who shares that integrative health means mind, body and spirit are treated as one. In practice, this means a squad of experts fine-tuning treatments to your physiological data.

Rakxa's doctors, wellness advisers, traditional medicine healers of the Ayurvedic, Thai and Chinese variety, trainers, physios, nutritionists and chefs work based on findings from muscle, bone and hormone panels.

Is there inflammation? What were the results of your body composition, blood, stool, DNA, *qi* life force? Are you deficient in micronutrients or laden in heavy metals? What's your skin's age? Because we don't know what we don't know, bloodwork and other diagnostic tools are used.

Next, a meeting with a former nurse turned wellness consultant. Armed with a background in traditional Chinese medicine and sandplay therapy, she joins the dots between my highly strung nature, sluggish digestion and choppy sleep patterns. With 'high cortisol' being bandied about, it's just as well I've checked in for the de-stress programme.

She draws up a comprehensive (read: jam-packed) programme on a sheet of paper and like a pilgrim on her wellness journey, I set off for a round of body work at Rakxa Jai, the resort's epicentre for alternative and traditional healing. The expansive property consists of six buildings dedicated to the various realms of health including movement, nutrition,

ancient healing therapies and modern medicine including aesthetics. Impressively, the Zen Na Tai massage she prescribed is just what my racing thoughts and ever-bloated tummy needed. Incorporating *chi nei tsang* and craniosacral therapy, the invigorating pressure point massage opens with singing bowls and focuses on getting the abdomen, lungs and mind back in sync.

Western science talks of the gut-brain axis, the link between the gastrointestinal tract and the nervous system. Somehow, I think our wise Asian healers and their ancient yet sophisticated understanding of the body have always made this connection.

Day Two: Medicine In Many Forms

I hit the ground running literally, performing a functional fitness assessment with a physiotherapist at Rakxa Gaya, a building for movement. She tests for strength, stamina, balance and more. After 50 minutes of running and lifting, hopping in the cryo sauna at the VitalLife clinic next door comes as welcome relief. At VitalLife, guests have access to Botox and lasers as much as they do dietetics, hyperbaric oxygen chambers and vitamin-filled intravenous infusions.

In the name of longevity, improved cognition and reduced stress, I brave -12°C temperatures in a sports bra and paper-thin Lululemons for the duration of Ariana Grande's '34+35'. Cooling the body on a tissue and cellular level is reportedly beneficial for anti-ageing and repair. It increases the metabolic rate for fat burning and reduces inflammation and pain.

Slipping straight from the cryo chamber and onto the whole body light therapy bed, my body is bathed in warm near-infrared light, triggering waves of deep relaxation. Used for relaxing muscles, treating injuries and boosting blood circulation, photobiomodulation also promotes collagen production. As I slowly defrost from the cold, I decide I'm living my best biohacking life.

After a very energising morning, I'm led into *yin* mode as a good-spirited traditional Thai medicine doctor shares the tenets of Thai women's care with me. She performs a time-honoured salt pot massage, where a poultice made of coarse salt and medicinal herbs heated over a charcoal stove is massaged into tense and tender spots to improve circulation and mobility. Like the other experts here, she uses instinct, touch and generational wisdom to initiate realignment.

If you're wondering if I managed to eat during these back-to-back, speed dating-esque wellness appointments, I did. At Unam, Rakxa's singular restaurant, I savour meals prepared with produce that are as vibrant as they are delicious. Chefs at Unam may use data collected from your medical tests to tailor a meal plan according to your goals, be it detox, weight loss or immunity building. Each lunch and dinner features a multi-course menu

RAKXA & REPEAT

Evidence-backed wellness dovetails with cutting-edge science at **Rakxa**, Bangkok's hottest integrative wellness retreat. Can beauty director Alli Sim biohack her way to wellbeing?



customised for your health needs. I am grateful my plan includes dishes such as lobster risotto made with pearl barley, octopus ceviche and *kanom tuay*—a coconut pandan pudding with mango caviar.

I am surprised to learn that Rakxa intentionally doesn't provide room service, and it's not just because the mouthwatering three-course meals may not travel well on resort buggies. Food is medicine, and so is connection: showing up, talking to others, slowing down to chew your food instead of scrolling through a meal.

The only shots you'll be doing at your villa's mini bar are of the fresh-pressed kind. The daily kombucha cocktails, also made fresh on property, have no business being this good. There may be no Coke, wine or cheese here, but my iPhone is filled with happy snaps of all the meal ideas gleaned from Unam.

Day Three: Letting Go

Bathroom scales are also not a thing at Rakxa, I realise before my 50-minute *tai chi* session. Progress and healing can't be defined by mere numbers on a scale.

I'm led to a candlelit, womb-like room where I attempt to still my mind in a warm flotation pool. The therapist plays Tibetan singing bowls over me, creating deeply relaxing sound wave sensations that reverberate in the water.

After a lunch of Labb salmon and grilled seafood, I meet Ayurvedic doctor, Dinesh Singh, who updates me on my body constitution according to Indian medicine, sharing the botanicals and foods to eat (and when) in order to maintain the delicate balance within.

For the next 140 minutes post-consult, I am treated to an ultra-indulgent four-hand massage created by the physician.

Known as Mano Maya, the stress management therapy is also recommended for those experiencing insomnia. It incorporates a full body massage and peaks with *shirodhara*, where warm sesame oil infused with herbs is slowly poured over the pineal gland, aka third eye and forehead. Lulled by the comforting oil, the treatment calms the mind while reducing tension. Before I can even think about the oil in my hair post-session, I'm whisked to a salon where my mane is shampooed, styled and positively glossier than ever.

Day Four: Healing To Go

With mere hours left before my flight home, I pop into VitalLife for a quick metabolism booster intravenous drip, formulated to relieve inflammation and improve energy and brain function while balancing blood sugar levels.

Overlooking the resort's sweeping landscape, lake and all, I reflect on the conversations and marvel at the uptick in my energy and mood in the short time here. And, naturally, I wonder how I'm going to sustain the momentum at home without the privilege of a wellness dream team.

Priced from 256,000 baht for a solo five-night stay during peak season, it's an investment to feel this mentally and physically enlightened. While it can feel exhausting to repeat your history to every expert, it's reassuring to know that each comes with their own piece of the health puzzle. An Ayurvedic doctor approaches your wellbeing through the lens of *doshas*, while a physiotherapist may discover a tight fascia due to one side of your body being stronger than the other. Both talk of imbalances and come with their solutions for equilibrium.

All I know is, if you're thinking of getting me a gift, my size is a five-night stay at Rakxa. ●

THIS PAGE
Tai chi, or meditation in movement, is one of the many mind-body workouts available.

FACING PAGE
In addition to Rakxa's science and tech-led treatments are a host of alternative experiences, such as Chakra Balancing which harmonises the body's seven *chakras* with Tibetan singing bowls for optimal energy.



IMAGES COURTESY OF RAKXA