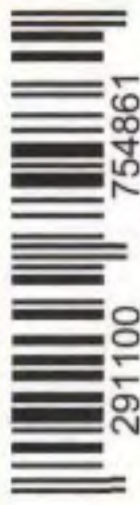


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# Eastern wisdom

FROM AN INDIAN CLASSIC TO A THAI  
GRAND DAME, OUR FAVOURITE WELLNESS  
RETREATS IN ASIA

## THAILAND

# RAKxa

Dogged by the January blues (and an uncomfortably expansive waistline after all the December and New Year festivities), I opt for a reset at RAKxa's 34-hectare retreat in Bangkok's secluded Bang Krachao. RAKxa's affiliation with the celebrated Bumrungrad International Hospital gives it a definite edge, but also a reassuringly pragmatic approach to health and wellness. Treatments are carried out in three different buildings, reached by buggy, foot or bicycle.

My immersion starts at the RAKxa VitaLife scientific wellness centre with a decidedly 21st-century line-up of metabolism-increasing IVs and sub-zero (-110°C to be exact) cryotherapy, which feels like exactly the systemic jumpstart I need. These lead into gentler, older-world practices from traditional Thai, Chinese and Ayurvedic philosophies. At RAKxa JAI, a dedicated health adviser helps me choose an acupuncture session from 200 treatments in holistic and alternative medicine; in the RAKxa GAYA medical gym, coaches help me realign my poor computer-practice posture with neuromuscular training. In between sessions, I melt into the retreat's stunning green-tiled lap pool or relax in my tranquil suite, hidden amid tropical greenery and deliberately minimalist. Many wellbeing retreats talk about seamlessly melding traditional therapies and Western science – RAKxa delivers. Kilos are lost, energy is regained, and I leave armed with new knowledge and medical results to improve my confidence moving forward.

SARAH SIESE [rakxawellness.com](http://rakxawellness.com)



## INDONESIA

# Como Shambhala Estate

Set on the fringes of Ubud and surrounded by temples, shrines and ashrams, this legendary hideaway has ancient therapies at its core, such as Taksu (using pressure and stretches) and hot-stone massage, best taken in open-air forest pavilions next to bathing pools hewn from natural rock. A local priest oversees purification rituals at the on-site sacred spring, where villagers come to pray; after a thorough dousing, I experience a poignant private blessing ceremony to the percussive sounds of gamelan and rindik instruments. The property has just launched three- to 10-night retreats, which might focus on stress, fitness or detox, combining treatments with private classes in yoga, Pilates, meridian-stretch qi gong and hydrotherapy. There's also a powerful new Ayurveda-inspired programme led by Dr Prasanth, who is softly spoken yet laser-focused in his quest to balance guests' doshas. I usually balk at breathwork, but his one-on-one was easy to follow; for once, I wasn't out of sync, panting, but actually feeling the energising effects of an oxygen boost with each extra-deep breath. Dr Prasanth followed up after check-out, emailing a bullet sheet of simple exercises. A strong narrative at Shambhala is the food – a passion of owner Christina Ong – with fresh organic ingredients used to make nourishing dishes such as grouper steamed in ginger and jackfruit curry. So maybe it's understandable that most guests come not for wellness programmes but restorative holidays. Alongside the fitness-junkie solos and couples from New York and London here during my stay were Aussie and Japanese families, who set off on guided walks through villages and bike trips between rice fields. Shambhala is at the top of its game – little wonder it's been pulling in repeats for the past 20 years.

MICHELLE JANA KHAN [comohotels.com](http://comohotels.com)

