

# VOGUE

AUSTRALIA

Get  
fashion  
fit

Defining  
the new  
athleisure

GYMWEAR  
ISN'T FOR  
EVERYWHERE  
**JODHI  
MEARES**

Jessica Alba  
How Australia helped  
make her millions

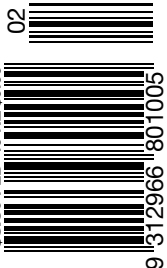
**OSCAR CAMPAIGN**  
THE NEW FEMINISM  
IN HOLLYWOOD

**HIGH  
SOCIETY**  
THE PRIVATE  
PARTIES  
FOR VIPS



\$8.50 FEB '16 NZ \$9.99

02



9 312966 801005

# Peace out

Beyond its astounding beauty and luxury, Thailand's Rayavadee resort offers an unexpected healing power, reviving world-weary visitors with its close connection to nature. *By Cushla Chauhan.*

The speedboat cuts through the hot dark night and in the dreamy languor of fatigue I feel an overwhelming sense of serenity. In the distance, fishing boats lie low on the water, blurs of neon green, while looming above, majestic and imposing, great karsts jut from the black sea, staking their claim on this watery stage.

It's only a short passage to my destination, Rayavadee, a luxury hotel on Krabi in southern Thailand, but even this brief transit caused a shift in my disposition.

After months of intense deadlines, my complexion is dull, I have frown lines like ravines and feel frazzled, tired and grumpy. Rayavadee, I hope, will recharge both my body and my mind.

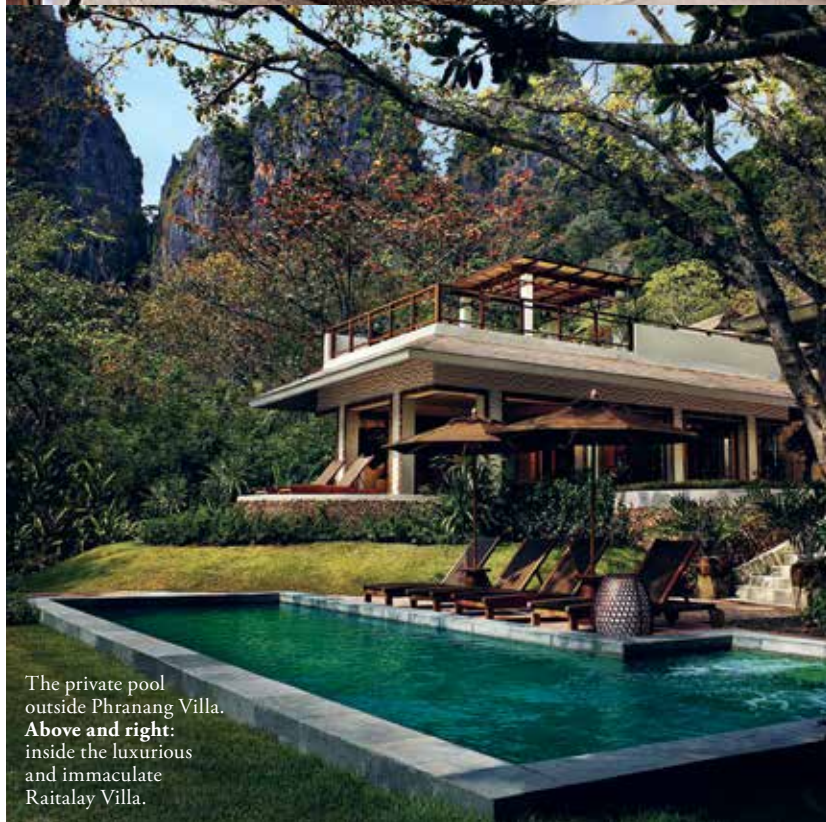
Alighting at the shore, I'm led to my villa down a moonlit path heady with fragrant blooms; I clamber into bed and surrender to a deep sleep, my first in forever.

It's not until the morning, woken by exotic birdcall, that I check out my dwelling properly. The Rayavadee Villa I occupy has two separate pavilions, each huge, each immaculately decorated in East Asian style and serviced by an on-call butler. Dressed in slippers and robe, exploring the villa's immensity and awed by its luxury, I feel like I've commandeered the life of a famous actress, a role I channel as I dramatically swing open the glass doors of my room to gaze upon my private infinity pool and beyond to the white sand of Phranang beach and its sparkling sea.

There are three other luxury beachfront villas on Rayavadee's vast 10-hectare property, as well as 98 two-storey pavilions veiled in lush topical gardens and coconut groves. "My" beach is just one of three accessible to guests, and the one from which I'll set off for my morning excursion: a boat trip to Phi Phi and outlying islands.

Perched at the stern, my hair is blown into a salty tangle as the speedboat flies over the waves before slowing to enter a secluded inlet surrounded by jungle-covered limestone cliffs that cut jagged patterns in the sky. I feel oddly bewildered: it's so beautiful it doesn't seem real. The water is such a ridiculously vivid blue I have to lift my sunglasses to check it's not a distortion of the lenses (or my computer-weary eyes), but if anything it appears more intense. Our party stops to swim, snorkel, or simply float, as I do, in the moment, focused only on sea and sky. The reverie is only broken by another boat entering the area, but we are due to

I'M LED TO  
MY VILLA  
DOWN A  
MOONLIT  
PATH  
HEADY  
WITH  
FRAGRANT  
BLOOMS



The private pool outside Phranang Villa. Above and right: inside the luxurious and immaculate Raitalay Villa.

head off anyway, traversing from reef to beach – all white shores haloed by luminous waters.

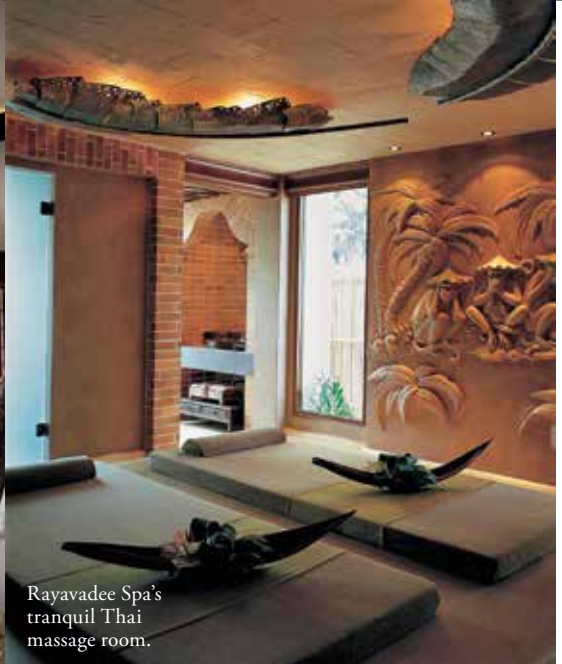
It's a wondrous thing to mark my day by the passage of the sun, to have my every whim taken care of – fresh, fluffy towels appear the moment I emerge from the water, an extravagant picnic lunch is set up for me under the palms ... my most pressing concern is if I've reapplied sunscreen – and to find the only traffic I need contend with are the footprints before me in the sand.

As the sun arches west, our group heads home, pausing to cheer on rock-climbers scaling precipitous rocky outcrops before diving into the sea below. For sporty types, rock-climbing is just one of the physical pursuits offered by the resort's activities centre, in addition to rafting, windsurfing, hiking, yoga, tennis and more. I, however, have left my Fitbit at home: it's strictly relaxation on the agenda.

Back in my villa, I decide to take a walk before dinner, so I head off with a garden map to explore the property, spotting squirrels



Lush jungle, soaring cliffs and sparkling sea frame the resort on Krabi's Phranang Peninsula.



Rayavadee Spa's tranquil Thai massage room.

and pretty langur monkeys leaping in the branches above. Rayavadee's flourishing surrounds aren't typical of most resorts, which tend to scale back vegetation to maximise beachfront views. Here, every coconut tree that dies is replaced; a point of difference in keeping with the hotel's conservationist approach while maintaining each dwellings' privacy and that feeling of total escape.

As dusk descends, I stroll along Phranang beach to the Grotto, a bar and restaurant nestled within a natural nook in the cliff face and the ideal spot from which to watch the sunset stain sea and sky orange then red, prompting me to meditate without even trying. I burrow my toes into the sand still seeping warmth, and feast on fat prawns from the barbecue. There are myriad dining options here, of course, including private meals and barbecues prepared under the stars at your own villa, but this is definitely my happy place.

The next day centres on an indulgent two hours' of pampering at the serene Rayavadee Spa. With an extensive spa menu that

includes massages, scrubs, facials and salon treatments, choosing what I want is the hardest decision I've encountered in the past 48 hours. Finally, I opt for a coconut bliss massage and afterwards emerge dazed and fragrant, my skin smooth and shiny like a polished nut, my mind free of, well, everything.

Rayavadee caters for every type of holiday-goer, whether you revel in the romance of it all, try every water sport available, shop, island-hop or simply languish by the pool.

For me, it has been a salvation of sorts. And while my departure across the water by day isn't quite as surreal as my arrival at night, I'm aware of the warm glow of my skin, the lingering aroma of ginger body wash, and at the mainland, the smell of rice and the thick sweet scent of mangoes lying in the hot sun, and reflect on the fact that Rayavadee, and indeed Thailand itself, is as much an awakening of the senses as it is an escape for the mind.

Revival complete. ■

*For more information, go to [www.rayavadee.com](http://www.rayavadee.com).*