

THE LONG VIEW

In a tranquil pocket of Phuket, a first foray into wellness retreats teaches valuable lessons in longevity and healthy ageing.

Words LYNN GAIL

“Your first treatment is the hyperbaric oxygen chamber,” Dr A, a leading longevity practitioner at Layan Life by Anantara advises. It sounds like a line from a Stephen King novel and even though I’m on the balmy island of Phuket in Thailand for a three-day longevity retreat, I’m struggling to relax.

But I’m not here to lie on a beach. Youth is slipping away, the mirror seemingly unforgiving; I’m trying to navigate a new life chapter. I want to get a grip on menopause. To slow down speeding-up body changes at my first-ever wellness retreat. Set inside extensive tropical gardens at Anantara Layan Phuket Resort, the world at large feels a million miles away.

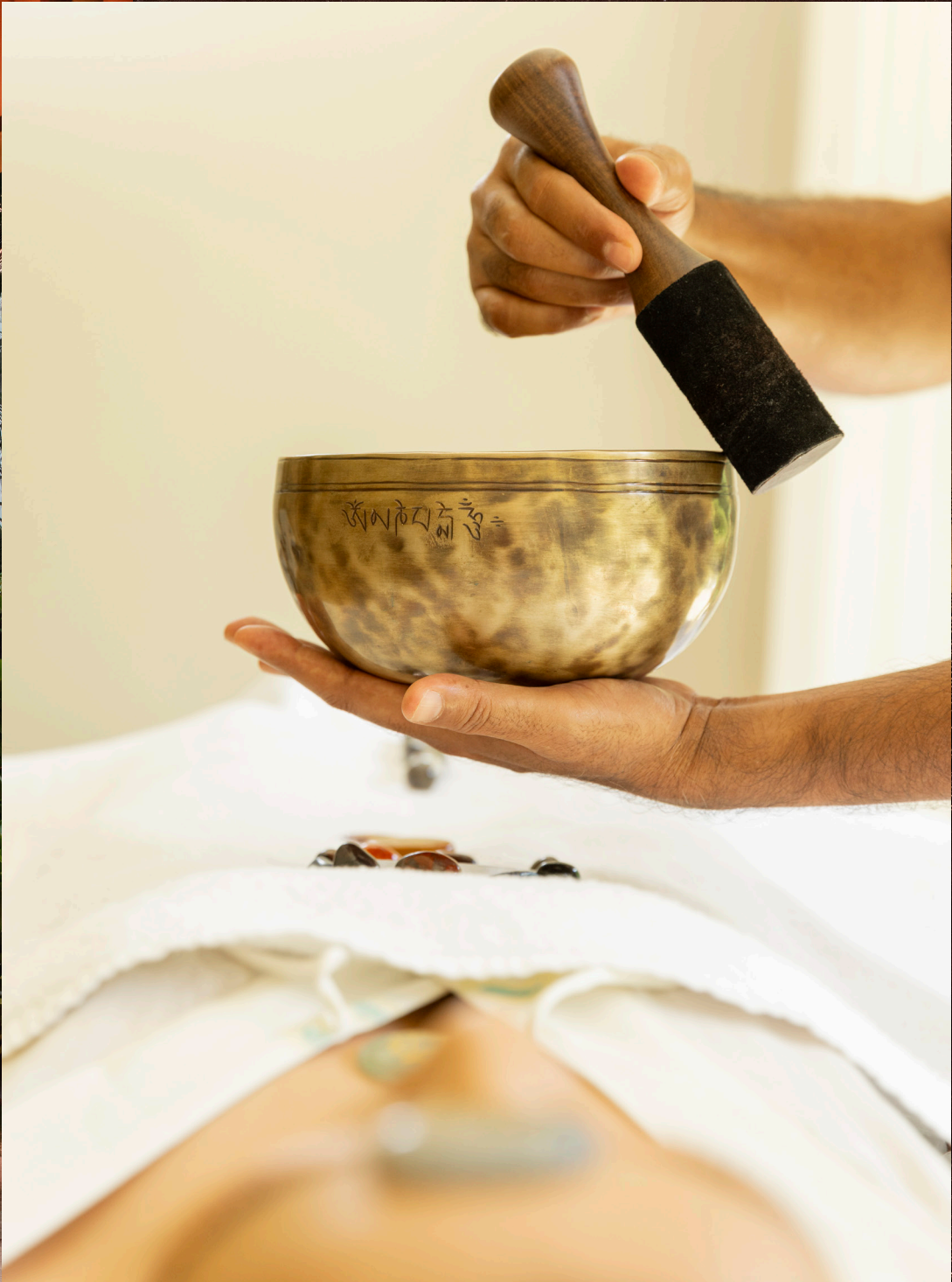
Dr A, shortened from Sataporn Wangthitikul, listens attentively during an initial in-depth consultation where he plans my personally tailored itinerary. Focusing on menopausal health, it begins with the prescribed hyperbaric chamber. The door is sealed aircraft-tight as I settle in for a 55-minute session in the look-alike Ferris wheel pod.

Pure oxygen pumps in, but for the first time ever, I feel claustrophobic. Taking deep breaths, I calm my busy mind, focusing on the benefits: alleviating brain fog, fatigue, hot flushes and aiding anti-ageing.

Our lives have become woven with fast-paced pressures. But how do we stop getting tangled up in society’s constantly connected web? How do we hit pause? With people’s desire to live longer and implement strategies for longevity, wellness tourism is skyrocketing. The Global Wellness Institute released a report in 2025 stating the wellness industry hit US\$6.8 trillion in 2024; in 2027 it’s projected to reach a staggering US\$8.5 trillion.

My ears pop as pressure decreases. True to claim, I feel rejuvenated. My earlier stress levels have levelled out, and relaxation sets in as I head to my next appointment with Dr Earnt, also known as Kornpathu Lipikorn, a certified Thai Traditional Medicine (TTM) expert. Since opening in 2024, Layan Life advocates implementing traditional medicine handed down over seven centuries – these remedies have been officially recognised in Thailand since 2000. >>

PHOTOGRAPHY HOLISTIC BY KHUN KEDAR/GIOVANNA DI LISCIANDRO (THERAPY WITH SINGING BOWL)



LEFT: Wellness sings at Layan Life by Anantara. OPPOSITE: Take in the fiery sunsets at Phuket's pretty Layan Beach.



“If in balance, we don’t require anything – but we need mindfulness, friendships and community for balance.”

Using only my date of birth, Dr Earnt is armed with pre-researched information. “You were born on a Sunday, meaning you have big fire personality,” she says. “But we work with the four main elements: *din* (earth), *lom* (wind), *nam* (water), and *fai* (fire).” With meditative flutes playing in the background she takes my pulse, lightly at first, then applying pressure. “Your pulse is good, but your deep pulse shows too much heat in your liver, your abdomen is too tight.” She also picks up shoulder tension, headaches, eczema and poor circulation. Her accuracy surprises me; in a flurry of dance-like movements, she opens drawers, jars and boxes filled with Thai herbs, delicately layering them in a thin glass teapot. Lotus pollen, rose petals, sappan wood, kwao krua, jasmine and shatavari infuse for 15 minutes. Taken regularly, the medicinal brew helps to target menopausal symptoms.

Women enter several chapters throughout their lives: puberty, peri-menopause, menopause, post-menopause – constant hormonal fluctuations. Add modern-day pressures including careers, exercise, nutrition, finances, emotional wellbeing – and it’s no wonder data shows 68 per cent of wellness clients worldwide are women.

I begin to feel a transformation as unravelling mind-and-body treatments open new pathways. Holistic healer and craniosacral therapist Dr Kedar Joshi says we have hardware and software. “I work on the software inside; if it’s in balance, we don’t require anything, no medicine, no doctors – but we need mindfulness, friendships and community for balance,” he says. He uses a light-touch technique I barely feel. A warm wave of calm flows within, clearing energy blockages.

I’m so relaxed afterwards I practically float to the beachside restaurant, where Anantara’s masterful chefs have created a dedicated wellness menu. Each dish lists nutritional content: protein, fat, carbohydrates. It’s fine dining feeding body and soul. The night gets even better when Thai dancers put on a pre-dinner show followed by captivating fire performers who light up the beach during rhythmic choreography set to tribal drumming.

The following morning I have a bevy of appointments. Two machines analyse, examine and study me from the inside out. I stand statue-still then squat as the 3D Moti Physio device scans my



structure, showing imbalances. The technician educates me on how to improve posture through stretching tight muscles, before and after exercise. But it’s the Styku 3D body scanner I slowly spin around on that reveals all. The report exposes my secrets on a larger-than-life TV screen. Body fat, fat mass, lean mass in percentages I wasn’t aware of. The therapist tells me I need to lose weight, eat more protein, build muscle mass and reduce kilojoules. It’s raw information delivered in a warm way.

My final treatment is a herbal-salt claypot massage. Soothing piano tones play in a room overlooking water fringed by lush foliage. Dr Earnt skilfully kneads my abdomen. Her strong fingers push deep, untying unseen knots as she manipulates tight areas. The treatment cherry-topper is the soothing hot claypot covered in herbs placed lightly on the skin, bringing deep relaxation.

I’d rather stay cocooned and continue my longevity journey. But I have the six pillars of health tucked into my wellness toolkit: community, friendships, spirituality, wellbeing, passions and nutrition. They are integral in staying youthful – in mind, body and soul. **IT**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
The 3D body scanners deliver detailed body metrics; Nutrition is part of the longevity toolkit; Dr Earnt’s expert wellness methods come with a smile; A blissful Layan Life treatment.
OPPOSITE: Find balance at the beachfront resort.



At a glance
Most international airlines fly from Australian cities to Phuket, Thailand; **ANANTARA LAYAN PHUKET RESORT** is around 30 minutes by taxi from the airport.

Personally tailored three-day longevity retreats by **LAYAN LIFE BY ANANTARA** start at \$3100, excluding accommodation. Sala Pool Villas at Anantara Layan Phuket Resort start at \$1550 per night, plus taxes. layanlifephuket.com



PHOTOGRAPHY LYNN GAIL (DR EARNT); PETER BAAS FOTOGRAFIE (DINING)