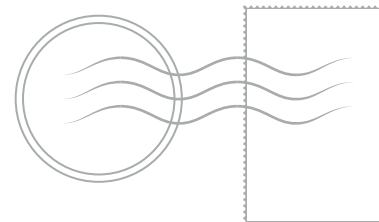


## POSTCARD

## Phuket



Ahead of the Banyan Tree Phuket's 30th anniversary in 2024, **Laura French** samples the resort's new Veya wellness offering

I'm lost in the middle of a maze, working my way round a series of winding paths between swathes of lush-emerald greenery and a bright, beaming sun.

But this isn't your classic hedge maze, and I'm not racing against a flurry of five-year-olds to find the centre. Instead I'm ambling, slowly and purposefully, through the Lotus Labyrinth – an intricate creation by Banyan Tree Phuket, designed as a place to meditate.

Resident wellness expert Raj tells us to align our steps with our breathing and to envisage our goals at the centre of the labyrinth. "Tune into the hum of the birds or the whistle of the wind and try to avoid any negative thoughts." It's a true test of focus – a mental challenge for someone accustomed to racing through tube stations at 100 miles an hour – but by the end I feel like I'm in a trance and stroll mindfully to breakfast.

It's one of a number of wellness experiences at Banyan Tree's flagship retreat in Thailand, home to 217 private pool villas scattered around a cerulean lagoon. For clients who book one of the resort's wellness-oriented Veya Pool Villas, introduced to the resort last year, experiences are included; for guests at the standard Pool and DoublePool Villas, an extra fee applies to certain activities.

The following morning I find myself wandering barefoot, eyes closed, along a bed of squishy grass as Raj leads us through a Conscious Grounding session designed to heighten our non-visual senses, while a Singing Bowl Meditation has me lying horizontal to the soothing sounds of singing bowls and chants.

I also take part in a healthy raw cooking class, have a go at making potpourri and try Muay Thai (conclusion: I'm not made for boxing, but it's a lot of fun).

It's the signature Sense of Place treatment at the Veya Spa that really has me relaxed, though. For two solid hours I'm scrubbed, polished and massaged with sticky rice, fragrant coconut milk, hot poultice oil and gold dust until I'm silky smooth. I leave feeling fully spaced out and ready to snooze, which is quite alright, because a bed larger than I've ever seen before awaits. **TW**



## BOOK IT

A stay at Veya Pool Villas starts from £464 per night based on two sharing, including daily breakfast, a bespoke wellbeing itinerary, a weekly schedule of 50 meditation and fitness classes to choose from and £113 resort credit per night. [banyantree.com](http://banyantree.com)



FROM TOP: Lap pool at Banyan Tree Phuket; weightless therapy

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Mikhail Grachikov; www.abouffoto.com/Kialtipong Panchee