

Travel

Scalpel tourism's healthy growth makes its mark

Merry Kirkwood | The Australian | May 07, 2011 12:00am

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ACCESS ALL AREAS

ASIA is renowned for its dizzying array of luxury resorts full of feel-good features, so it's a little surprising for a Thai resort with five-star credentials to promote itself to Australians as Asia's premier drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre.

The Cabin, Chiang Mai, promises "privacy and anonymity", a 96 per cent "completion rate" for its guests, plus elephant trekking, whitewater rafting and other, more usual, holiday activities.

Medical travel is a growing international phenomenon. This type of tourism involves seeking healthcare services away from home, often because of "high costs, long waiting lists or limited healthcare capacity" in travellers' countries of origin, according to UN studies.

Travelling to improve one's health is not new. Ancient Mediterranean pilgrims made their way to Epidaurus on Greece's Saronic Gulf to visit the healing god Asclepius, while also relaxing in balmy waters, indulging in local wines and touring landmark sites. Asclepius would be dumbfounded by figures from the International Trade Commission in Geneva that suggest medical tourism could grow into a \$US188 billion global business by 2013. India, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand attracted more than 2.5 million medical travellers in 2005, while conservative projections indicate this form of specialised tourism in Asia will surpass the \$US4bn mark by next year, with parallel growth in wellness tourism.

Concerns regarding professional competence and, recently, the spread of antibiotic-resistant infection post-surgery should remain front-of-mind for Australians considering treatment overseas.

However, deals offering inexpensive air travel, transferable patient records and increasingly sophisticated yet cost-effective Asian medical and wellness regimes make this type of travel an alternative for the underinsured or those keen to improve their wellness while on holiday.

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LITTLE BLACK BOOK

GOLD Coast-based Pamela Hayes heads the Bali Luxury Villa Collection of properties, including Sungai Bali and the couples-only Sungai Gold. More: [www.bali-villasungai.com](http://www.bali-villasungai.com).

**Desperate to get back to:** Singita Lebombo at Kruger National Park in South Africa, for top-end accommodation, premium game-viewing and seriously good food and wines.

**Top shopping secret:** Brunello Cuccinelli in the MLC Centre, Sydney, for very simple and beautiful clothes.

**Perfect place for indulgence:** Four Seasons Hotel, Hampshire, for an indulgent weekend escape from London (only one hour by train).

**Must visit:** Amanresorts luxury boutique properties for unexpected levels of personal service and unique locations.

**Stand-out bar experience:** Lantern, Fullerton Bay Hotel, a sophisticated rooftop bar with panoramic views over the Singapore skyline.

**Ultimate eco-adventure:** Singita Boulders Lodge at Sabi Sands private game reserve in South Africa.

**Inviting food destination:** Kayuputi, the premier dining spot at St Regis Bali Resort, Nusa Dua, Bali.

**Most memorable splurge:** Four Seasons Langkawi in Malaysia.

**Most distinctive hotel:** Longitude 131, Uluru; nothing beats dining under the stars, looking towards this wonderful icon.

**Best-spent travel dollars:** A recent trip to Amankila on Bali's east coast. We were upgraded to the premier Amankila Suite overlooking a 30m pool deck high above the Lombok Strait.

BLOW-OUT

PERCHED on the 34th-floor rooftop of Kuala Lumpur's Pacific Regency Hotel Suites, with a 360-degree view to surrounding skyscrapers, including Petronas Towers, Luna is a popular haunt for locals and tourists alike and a perfect place to watch the sun set over the city's serrated skyline. Go early to snap up a private corner, dine al fresco or sip designer cocktails at indoor or poolside bars at this award-winning multi-level space. With a vibe that's part Gotham City, part modern Asia, Luna has been a recent winner in the Hospitality Asia Regional Best Nightspot awards. Open 5pm-1am. More: [www.luna.my](http://www.luna.my).

BLOWN AWAY

KUALA Lumpur's Petronas Towers were the tallest buildings on the planet for six years until 2004 and retain their title as the world's tallest twin towers. Leaving aside height comparisons, the standout feature of the sci-fi duo is a skybridge linking the pair on the 41st and 42nd floors, offering views across the modern capital of Malaysia to the Gombak foothills, with their spectacular Batu caves and temples, 13km to the city's north. The skybridge is open to visitors and entry is free, but tickets are limited to 1700 visitors a day on a first-come, first-served basis. Go early to avoid disappointment. More: [www.petronastwintowers.com.my](http://www.petronastwintowers.com.my).

DEALS OF THE WEEK

**Beach break:** The award-winning The Byron at Byron resort on the NSW north coast has a Winter Embrace special valid until September 7: \$285 a night twin-share in a standard suite, a saving of \$100. Indulge in the resort spa and dip into Byron Bay's restaurant and cafe culture. More: 1300 554 362; [www.thebyronatbyron.com.au](http://www.thebyronatbyron.com.au)

**Into Indochina:** Book by May 31 for a \$200 discount on Wendy Wu Tours' Vietnam Highlights departing July 9; from \$3889 a person twin-share ex Sydney and Melbourne. Includes return economy airfares, 16 nights' accommodation, all meals, sightseeing and transportation. More: 1300 727 998; [www.wendywutours.com.au](http://www.wendywutours.com.au).

**The beauty of Bhutan:** Bhutan's culture and textiles are key components on a small-group tour from November 4 to 21 escorted by Christine Pearson from Active Travel; from \$8665 a person, including flights from Australia, ground transport, twin-share accommodation in traditional hotels, meals and entry fees. More: (02) 6249 6122.

ARMCHAIR TRAVELLER

Relocation, Phil Down Under: The ever-cheery Phil Spencer has left his bossy colleague Kirstie Allsopp back in the Old Dart and is helping to resettle Poms down under; it's series two of this property hit and tonight he's in Canberra, looking for the perfect digs for the Morris family from deepest Wales. Wednesday, 8.30pm, LifeStyle.

**Big Cat Diary:** Who could resist this doco series that charts the lives of lions, cheetahs and leopards in Kenya's Masai Mara; the camerawork is stunning, the landscape bold and beautiful, and danger is never far away, especially for feline cubs. Weekdays in May, 4pm, BBC Knowledge.

Susan Kurosawa

ACCESSORY OF THE WEEK

BRING home the feel of your holiday with Hotel Luxury Collection's new bedding range. Amalfi sheets, pillowcases and duvet covers in cotton sateen feature an 800 thread count, sheet depth of 33cm or 43cm, and a double row of satin embroidery. For queen, king and super king beds, from \$110. More: [www.hotelluxurycollection.com](http://www.hotelluxurycollection.com).

Sharon Fowler

QUOTABLE

"To travel in farther Asia is to discover a novelty previously unsuspected and unimaginable."

Lord Byron

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TEST case under way to determine whether female air traffic controller can sue for being exposed to her male colleague's porn.

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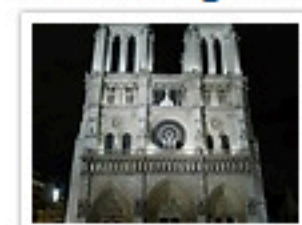
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