

METRO Society

Arts, culture, and charity Issue

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Bencab's true muse

The elusive Jasmine
Cabrera on her life in
London, her passions
and lessons from dad

HOT PROPERTY
The new generation
of artists you need
to know now

CHIANG MAI EXCLUSIVE

Metro Society
holidays in Thailand's
rarely seen side

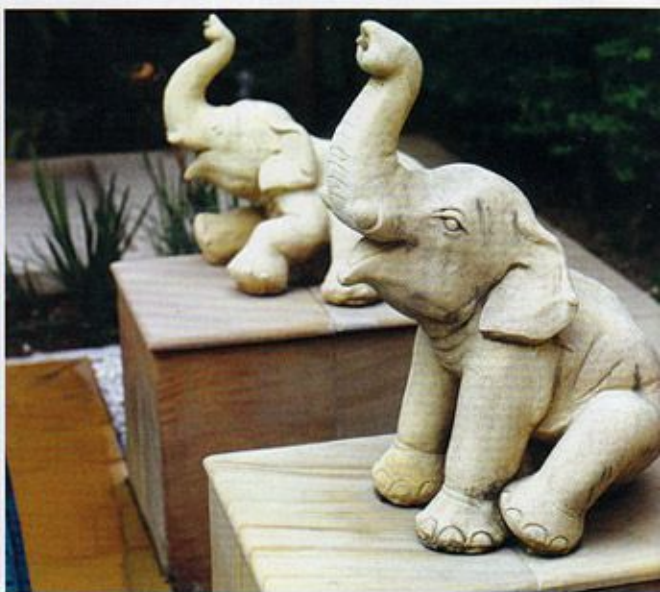
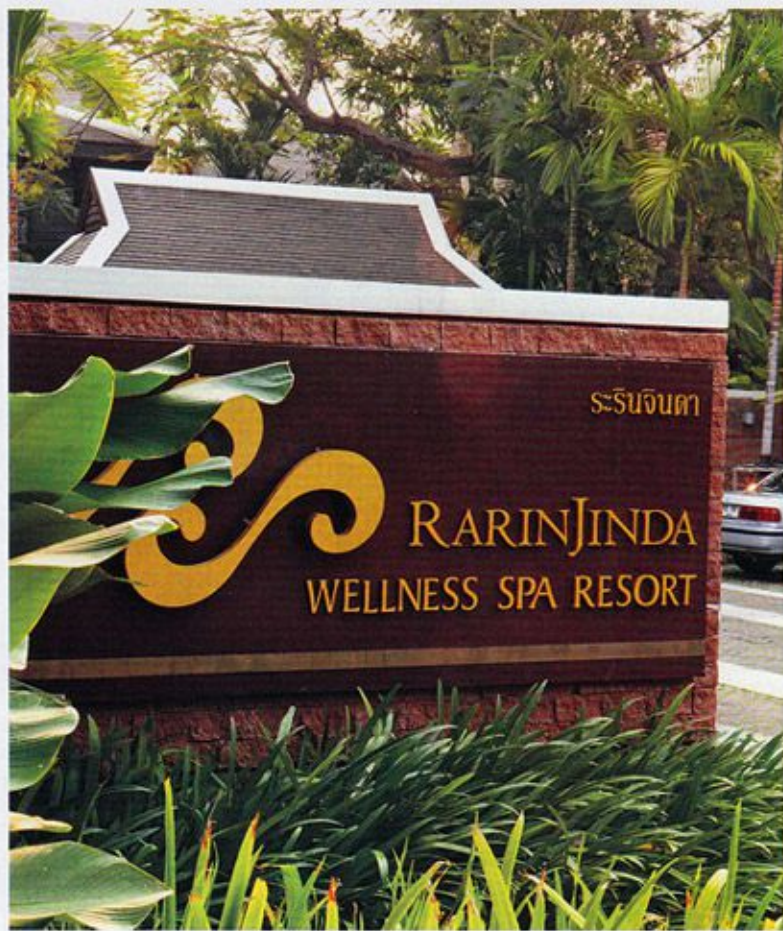
HOPE ON THE HILL
The inspiring story
of a couple sending
Smokey Mountain
kids to school

Plus:

Bernardo Fort-Brescia, Kim Atienza, Mark Villar,
Silvana Diaz, Didi Dee, Albert Avellana,
Omeng Esquerro, Barge Ramos and more

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This page: The entrance to the RarinJinda Wellness Spa Resort where sandstone elephants and flowers greet the guests. Opposite page: A sense of calm fills your soul from the moment you arrive at the spa. Songs of water, dances of the leaves, aromatic scents, soothing music, and fresh air—all these elements combine to create the ideal environment for healing, relaxation, and rejuvenation.

In Chiang Mai, no one escapes Songkran, the New Year festival. Thais celebrate it by throwing water on everyone and everything. Water is everywhere—scooped from silver bowls or sprayed with toy guns or pumped from oil drums mounted on trucks. Our group was soaked as we watched the parade from the bridge. But that's getting ahead of the story.

Thai Airways, through its GM Nivat Chantarachoti, organized a wellness weekend at Chiang Mai during Songkran. But if the essence of wellness is about inner peace and happiness, well, the airline certainly makes sure you experience that within its cabins and even before your flight.

The Royal Silk experience begins at the moment of making the reservation. We were met at the Ninoy Aquino airport by Malu Dueñas and breezed through check-in to the Thai Airways lounge. We were seated in Thai Royal Silk Class. The new seating offers 60 inches of pitch, with 170 degrees recline. State-of-the-art entertainment system included large format, touch-control screens, features and inter-active games channels, plus personal telephones operated from each seat. After a splendid meal, I kept myself busy watching movies till we landed at Bangkok's fabulous new Suvarnabhumi airport.

In Bangkok, Khun Lek of the Tourism Authority of Thailand whisked us off to the domestic side of the airport for the one-hour flight to

Chiang Mai. There we were met by Khun Pong, managing director of Trikaya Tours. By the time we got to the brand new RarinJinda Wellness Spa Resort—our home for three days—we were already eager for its wonderful treatments.

Serenity and luxury

Situated on the east bank of the Ping River, RarinJinda means "the stream of gems." The highlight of the spa is the 140-year-old ancestral teakwood house formerly owned by Dr. Chinda Singhanetr. The house, showcasing Thai, Chinese, British and Burmese influences, holds an impressive collection of antiques. Its genteel atmosphere, along with the river and the majestic Suthep mountains, makes arriving guests feel at home.

Resort director Prasert Jiravanstit explains that more than the luxurious facilities and treatments for the physical body, they place importance on glowing happiness and inner well-being. Thus the holistic approach to health, and the creation of a healing environment where every element works harmoniously towards the ultimate goal.

The resort has 35 rooms, each one equipped with state-of-the-art amenities, and beautifully decorated to achieve a serene and uplifting atmosphere. It has deluxe rooms, pool-access rooms, wellness suites and the luxurious RarinJinda villa, each with its own balcony overlooking the swimming pool, echoing the Thai tradition of building verandas from which to view the beautiful outdoors.





The spa's in-house doctor, Sushil Rahul, holds naturopathic consultations. The treatments combine traditional Western and Eastern healing practices. Rooms are especially prepared to offer optimal comfort while ensuring efficacy of treatments. Visitors looking for absolute privacy can indulge in the villas with magnificent views of the river.

Surrounded by water

One classification of treatments is hydrotherapy, which uses water pressure and temperature variations. There's the hydro pool for the massage that helps increase blood flow, removing toxins and wastes from the system through the transmission of oxygen and nutrients to the body systems. The buoyancy of water relieves pressure and relieves aching limbs. You go through eight stations with varying intensities of water to penetrate specific muscles.

There's also a special hydro bathtub where the pressure exerted by the water, blended with spa medications, provides a relaxing sensation of weightlessness. For an experience of standing under an invigorating waterfall, you'll want the Vichy shower—you lie on a massage table, sprayed with jets of water from above at varying temperatures and pressure.

The resort also advocates ayurveda—the ancient Indian health system based on body-mind interconnectedness. One particular ayurvedic treatment is *shirodhara*, where warm, herb-infused oil gently poured onto the forehead for an extended period of time and then followed by a body massage. It is said to reduce stress, clear the mind, calm emotions, and promote sleep and improve moods.

Pains are eased and the knots of the muscles are reduced by a slow adjustable extensive supply of dry heat. It relieves the pressure on the predestined parts of the body by embedding them in special coarse-grained sand. This treatment also includes the ancient Tibetan practice of using sound for healing. This unique treatment blends intuitive massage with sound waves resonating from ancient Tibetan bowls to restore and balance the energy field, chakras and nervous systems only to be transported to a deep level of peace.

Smooth, water-heated, basalt stones of various sizes are rubbed and placed over the pressure or key points of the body. The heat through stones relaxes strained muscles with traditional massage strokes that removes muscles aches, improves circulation and detoxifies. It is widely believed that one hot-stone stroke is equal to four by hand.

Seeing Chiang Mai

Our group visited the Ratchaphruek Gardens, the site for the Royal Floral Expo in 2006, a horticultural exhibition celebrating the 60th anniversary of the King's ascension and his 80th birthday. It sprawls 80 hectares at the Royal Agricultural Research center and will soon be developed into an information center for horticulture. One of its most visited attractions is the Ho Kham Royal Pavilion that has paintings of King Bhumibol. It also houses the gorgeous Tree of the Ten Kingly Virtues. It is comprised of layered orbs of golden *bodhi* leaves, symbolic of how the king provides a garden of spiritual shade for his people.

A visit to Chiang Mai is not complete without the Wat Doi Suthep temple, located on top of the overlooking mountain. According to legend, holy relics discovered during the reign of King Kuena (1355-1385) were placed in a *howdah* (an ornate carriage) on the back of a white elephant. The elephant wandered freely, eventually came to a stop and dropped dead from fatigue from the long journey. That resting place was presumed to be the most auspicious place to build the temple.



This and opposite page: RarinJinda House, a Thai teak-wood house dating nearly a century and a half, contains traditional Thai furniture and antiques that tell stories of ages past. Not only is this special setting steeped in historical ambience, but it also exudes an atmosphere of warmth that greets guests and embraces all who visit. Private massage rooms are available at RarinJinda House.



RarinJinda offers the ultimate in spa experience—clockwise from top left: the hydrotherapy pool; the Tibetan sound and warm sand bed therapy room; the detoxifying infrared sauna; and the foot massage area. Opposite page: All the rooms have a veranda overlooking the swimming pool.

