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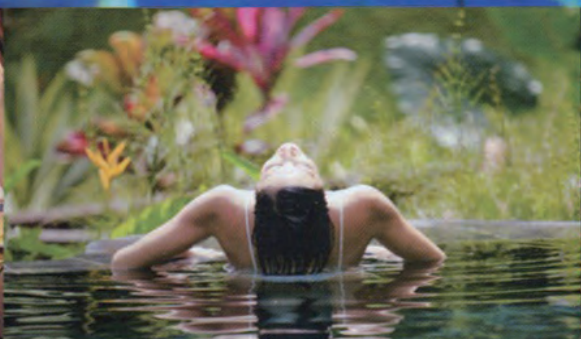


ESCAPE TO

ASIA GARDENS

IN THE MED

Relax in the botanical beauty of Barcelo's Asia Gardens Hotel & Thai Spa near Alicante and allow yourself to be nurtured amongst nature



MAIN IMAGE:
ONE OF THE HOTEL'S
LUXURIOUS INFINITY
POOLS. BELOW IMAGES
FROM LEFT: THE
LANGKAWI SUITE; THE
RESORT'S RENOWNED
GARDENS AND POOL;
THE KOH SAMUI
RESTAURANT; SWIM ALL
YEAR-ROUND IN THE
DELIGHTFULLY HEATED
OUTDOOR POOL



As you wander along paths flanked by palm trees, the sound of trickling water soothes your soul and calms your mind. The Mediterranean glitters in front of you, while pine forests cover the surrounding hillside. You swim from one infinity pool to another, then another, led only by the cascading water.

Everything at the Asia Gardens near Alicante in Spain is designed to ease the natural flow of energy. You notice it as soon as you arrive. This is a place where you settle in and feel at home in minutes, not hours. It is only a two-hour flight from the UK, and half an hour's drive from Alicante airport, so you are enjoying your break from the outset.

To make the most of the Asia Gardens experience, head straight for the Thai Spa and feel your stress slip away. The therapists – who are all from Thailand – are highly-qualified after studying for years at the Wat Pho temple in Bangkok. For the traditional Thai massage, you lie on a cool futon wearing loose cotton

clothes while your therapist gently stretches out your muscles and massages the pressure points on your body. Focusing on the ten key energy channels and carefully tailoring movements to suit the individual, the therapists use their fingertips, elbows, forearms and feet during the session. Afterwards you will feel calm, centred and alert.

The next day, you could also try the Balinese massage, or the Lomi-Lomi technique which is traditional in Hawaii. Pregnant women are given a special massage aimed at relieving tension in the neck and back, while also stimulating the circulation.

The spa gives onto the gardens, so you can walk straight from the treatment rooms onto private terraces. Like everywhere in the hotel, the emphasis is on light and space. Sink into the outdoor hot tub and breathe in the pine-scented air, or swim in the delicious pool reserved just for people using the spa.

The hotel is in the foothills of the Sierra Cortina, with the Mediterranean coast a couple of miles away. A semicircle of terracotta structures, set on three levels, hugs the contours of the hillside, with panoramic views of the curving coastline of the Costa Blanca. The mountains create a microclimate along this stretch of the coast, with sunshine nearly every day and with two of the seven outdoor pools heated to a perfect 28-32 degrees, you can rest assured that you can go for a swim at any time of the year.

Although the resort is set amongst several acres of lush gardens, the atmosphere is more like a boutique hotel, with lots of different areas where you can relax totally in peace. Just walk down another path, see where those steps lead to... and discover your

own favourite, secret spot in the gardens. If you like to start the day with a run, there are several routes around the grounds and in the surrounding hills. Or you might prefer a yoga or Qi Gong (chi kung) class with the hotel's expert instructor. If you fancy a round of golf, there are two 18-hole golf courses designed by Jack Nicklaus right next to the hotel.

A sense of space and harmony permeates the rooms too, which have a minimum surface area of 30 square metres. With traditional Balinese fabrics and furniture in natural tones of taupe, cream and gold, the rooms are individually designed to make the most of the light, views of the mountains and the sea. Some have sloping thatched roofs, either inside or on the terrace. Bathrooms have huge rainforest showers in charcoal slate and separate bathtubs.

Have a long, lazy lunch at the Palapa poolside restaurant, which specialises in Mediterranean dishes, using locally-grown rice and vegetables. At night, continue the Asian vibe in Koh Samui restaurant, which serves spicy dishes inspired by the cuisines of Indonesia, Thailand, Bali and Singapore. Or try the contemporary cooking at In Black, where the chef uses the best seasonal ingredients to create dishes such as scallops with a zingy mango salad and cactus sorbet.

Afterwards, chill out with a cocktail on the candlelit terrace of the Bonsai bar, named after the 150 year-old tree there. With live blues or jazz on some nights, it is the perfect end to the day.

For more information on Barcelo Asia Gardens visit asiagardens.es or call +34 966 818 400, or email asiagardens@barcelo.com

