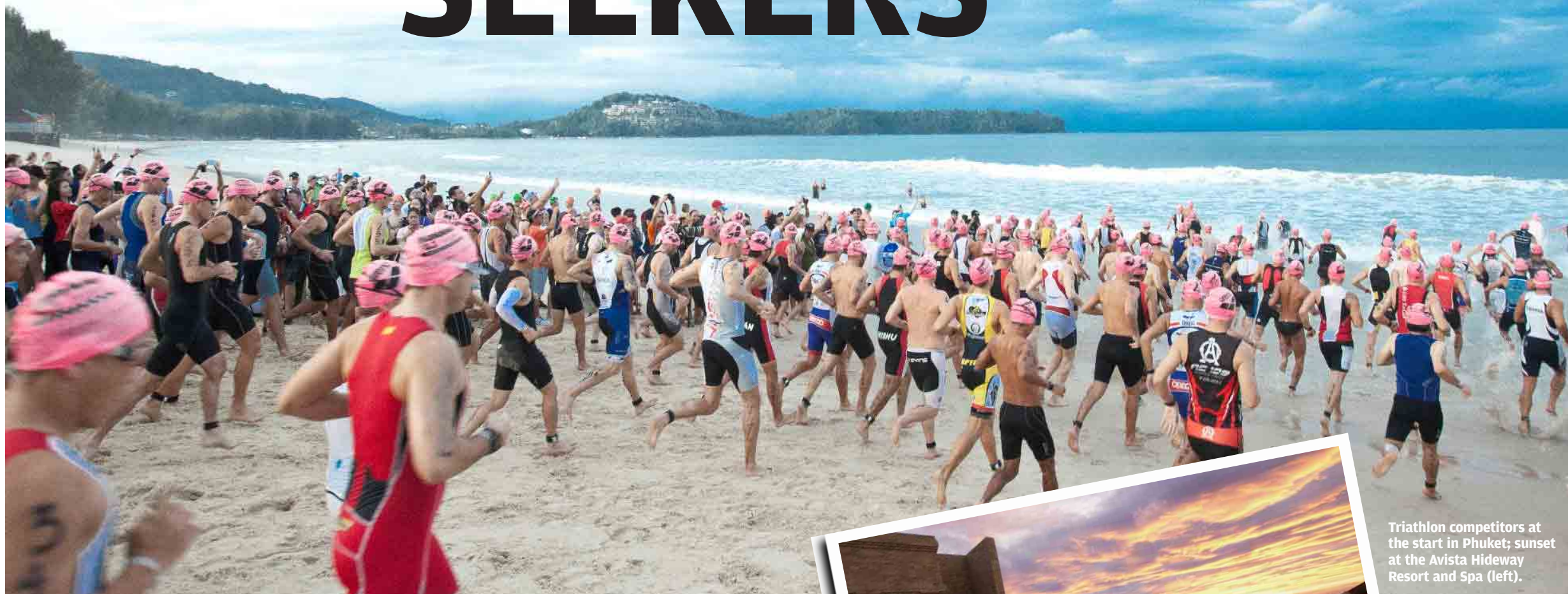


FITNESS & WELL-BEING

Thai resorts offer top sports facilities for those who prefer fitness training to buffets, says Rachel Jacqueline

DRILL SEEKERS



Triathlon competitors at the start in Phuket; sunset at the Avista Hideaway Resort and Spa (left).

Island holidays are usually about relaxing, departing from routine and indulging yourself at a luxury retreat. "Healthy" they generally are not, as sunset cocktails, seafood buffets and hours lazing in the sun become the daily regime. But as concerns about our well-being grow, even our breaks are becoming infused with healthy alternatives. And Phuket, in Thailand, is leading the way.

Offering your not-so-ordinary holiday is Thanyapura, one of the province's new hotels, just 15 minutes from the airport. From the outside, there is little to suggest that it is a dedicated sports hotel where guests receive free access to a 50-metre pool, six tennis courts, running track, full-sized multipurpose pitch, boxing ring, state of the art gym and a Powerplate studio.

Typical guests range from weekend warriors to the athletic elite – Hong Kong's triathlon team trained there in December, attracted by the opportunity to do intensive workouts in a relaxed environment.

"People come to prepare for races. We have swim training, track training and cycle camps on offer from experts," says hotel president Robert Huack. Families seeking an alternative holiday have also been flocking to Thanyapura, which hosts an integrative health centre where guests can enjoy the latest anti-ageing treatments, and even a fully equipped kids' club. Think healthy holiday village meets a top-notch sports club.

"We recently had a top Hong Kong executive stay here for two weeks with his wife just to get healthy," says Huack. "Most of our food is organic and he and his family worked out in the morning and then spent the afternoon at the beach."

Thailand's tourism authority predicts the country will become the world's leading health and wellness destination, generating a significant portion of the total expected tourism revenue of US\$67 billion in 2014.

Phuket is leading the way, thanks to its accessibility (there are daily flights from Asia and Europe), infrastructure, and a growing pool of expatriate expertise attracted by the opportunity of building their careers in paradise.

Aleanta Resort and Spa Phuket, Phang Nga is one resort jumping on board the burgeoning health movement on the island.

Situated on the secluded Natai beach, 20 minutes north of the airport, on the main island just over Sarasin bridge, the small luxury boutique hotel has started offering personalised yoga classes to guests. It also offers detox, or a least a form of it.

"We offer a luxury variation of the detox, yoga and spa buffet," says Paul Counihan, director of sales and marketing for AMHS Hotels. The hotel has an in-house yoga teacher who offers free yoga to guests before breakfast on the sand three mornings a week.

If guests elect for an Aleanta detox, they will be nourished

I wanted to create a space where executives could enjoy a holiday while creating balance

RAMESH KHENDRY, FOUNDER, VISTA HIDEAWAY RESORT

with fruit juices and fresh, locally sourced vegetarian dishes throughout the day, while being cleansed and massaged at the hotel spa. Five national parks within a 45-minute radius offer rafting, mud-biking and trekking – the resort does tours for those looking for a dash of adventure.

In the hills above Patong beach, alternative therapy is being combined with five-star pampering at Avista Hideaway Resort and Spa. The luxury hotel offers authentic Ayurvedic treatments by trained Ayurveda doctor, Alvin James. On arrival, guests are offered a complimentary Ayurvedic assessment after which they



\$67b
The forecast revenue, in US dollars, from Thai tourism in 2014



Asia's first certified rehab centre for substance addiction, Bhavana (left); dedicated sports hotel Thanyapura (above). Photos: SCMP Pictures

rehabilitation centre, says founder and CEO Dr Kai Goh. Operating since August 2011, Bhavana is the only rehab and detox centre to receive an official Thai government hospital licence to dispense medication.

A registered psychiatrist who specialises in addictions, Goh was inspired to establish an Asian clinic several years ago, after he discovered that many of his patients in Britain and the United States were travelling to Asia to receive treatment. He chose Phuket as a location because he felt it had a lot to offer, he says.

"All the different boxes that you need to tick are in Phuket," says Goh. These include world-class medical professionals, infrastructure and an internationally recognised standard of service.

As a destination, Thailand is cheaper than other countries in the region. "The Bhavana centre gives people a proper timeout from their enabling environment in an idyllic destination."

As health and wellness gain greater importance in our lives, it seems they will become more prominent in our holidays, too.

Besides, what better way is there to address the needs of your body, mind and soul than in an exotic location, with a cocktail still in close reach? life@scmp.com

PERSONAL BEST

If workouts become a chore, get creative

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Hands up if you've ever had to drag yourself to a workout session. We all know the importance of regular exercise, but sticking to a routine isn't always easy, especially if the activity in question starts to feel like a chore.

Even if we have no problem committing ourselves to working out when we have to, it can be tough to keep at it if we don't enjoy what we're doing.

Personal fitness trainer Li Si Yang from Journey to Fitness agrees that boredom and a lack of motivation have a lot to do with people abandoning their workouts. "From what I've seen, much of this boredom is due to a lack of knowledge people have about exercise and their own bodies," she says. "It's only when we fully understand both that we start to get really creative.

Creativity gets us excited and motivates us to be consistent."

Boredom may also set in if we've been working out for a while but aren't getting the results we want. It isn't just our mind that gets bored, but our muscles, too. To see results, our muscles also need to be challenged in interesting ways.

So switching our routine from time to time and making it fun not only ensures that we



Tennis gives you a great workout and it's a lot of fun to play.

stick to the programme, it also works different muscle groups so that we get optimal results. When we see that what we're doing is working, we are more likely to enjoy it and stay committed to the plan.

Sam Naqvi, a trainer from Funky Fitness, says that he sees many people lose interest in working out after just two to three weeks of beginning an exercise programme.

"They expect an immediate physical transformation, and when that doesn't happen, they give up," he says.

"It takes six to eight weeks for a new habit to form, so it's important to choose a physical activity you enjoy, one that you know you'll still be doing several weeks and months down the track. If it's fun, you know you'll do it. Otherwise, you are just setting yourself up for failure."

Here, fitness enthusiasts explain how to make exercise fun.

Sunita Shahdadpuri: I always plan something to look forward to after my power walks, like an iced flavoured coffee or a small sweet treat. Knowing that I have a reward waiting for me at the end of my walking route makes the workout so much more enjoyable.

Marie Monozca: As a marathoner, I love going for long runs with my fellow marathon runners. We chat while running, which is not only fun, it also makes the time go by quickly. Sometimes, a golf cart with a driver tails us and we'll stop every few kilometres to rehydrate or have a quick bite of our packed cut fruits or an energy bar. And before we know it, we've past our target of 15 kilometres.

Jason Lim: It's the people who make a place or an environment. So to spice up your gym sessions, it's important to choose a trainer who is open-minded and fun – for example, someone who is able to crack jokes during your workout to keep you motivated – and who is creative enough to vary your routine from time to time so you don't get bored.

Evelyn Goh: Exercise should feel like a hobby and not something

to dread. I took up dancing as a way to keep fit, simply because I love moving my body to music. Now my dance classes are the highlight of my week – I can't get enough.

Luke Ng: Don't stick to just one physical activity. Once every few months, introduce a new workout to the mix so you'll not only exercise a new set of muscles, but you'll also have a chance to try something different.

Michael Fung: I work out for two hours at a time, which can feel tedious if I've had a long day. To motivate myself, I break down my workout into mini sessions. I love a challenge so it's always fun for me to try and meet these small goals.

Mandy Chia: I look forward to my weekly gym sessions if I know I have something nice to wear. I'm always looking for opportunities to show off my new gear."

Kenny Ho: I don't exercise, I play. When I think of all the fun sports I indulge in, like tennis, basketball and squash, there is no way they could ever be boring because I see them as games. At the end of the day, when it's time to sweat it out, I feel so excited because I know I'm going to have fun.

THE TASTE TEST VEGGIE BURGERS

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Boca Original Vegan Veggie Burgers

283 grams (four patties) for HK\$45, Oliver's Boca, one of the first veggie burgers to hit the mainstream in 1979, is primarily made from soya bean protein and wheat gluten. Each patty is cholesterol free, has 70 calories, 13 grams of protein and 90 per cent less fat than a ground beef hamburger (just 0.5 grams). **Verdict:** looks and tastes synthesised; while it has the texture of ground chicken, the plasticky flavours don't lie.



Gardenburger Sun-dried Tomato Basil Veggie Burgers

284 grams (four patties) for HK\$73, Oliver's These burgers don't set out to be fake meat; they're straight up veggie patties mainly made of brown rice, onions, red bell peppers, tomato paste and rolled oats. Each has 100 calories, four grams of protein and 2.5 grams of fat. **Verdict:** flavourful, savoury, and with a good slightly meaty texture from the rice and oats.



Food for Life Moophrey Vegan-Vegetarian Burgers

284 grams (four patties) for HK\$66, Oliver's Primarily made from soya bean flour, wheat gluten, and carrageenan (a seaweed extract), these actually look, smell and taste like real burgers. Each patty has 110 calories, 1.5 grams of fat and 16 grams of protein. **Verdict:** I could have been fooled in thinking this was real meat; a perfect alternative for veggie-based diets.

