



Photo: Supachai Vetchamaleerom

PURE ALCHEMY

Premchit Prateap Na Thalang shares some of her received ancient Siamese wisdom with Bronwyn Ure, and explains the unique concept behind her Experience Premchit wellness retreats.

Premchit Prateap Na Thalang is arguably one of Thailand's most knowledgeable experts on ancient Siamese nutrition and remedies. Her ancestral lineage is steeped in the history and traditions of Phuket and its people, a place renowned for its exquisite natural beauty. The wisdom of Premchit's ancestors, who once traded with the founders of the British East India Company, has been meticulously handed down through several generations of her family, and Premchit has made it her mission to share her time-honoured legacy with all who seek personal wellness.

Following many years of experience designing products for spas throughout the world, Premchit recently started her own wellness retreat programme, Experience Premchit.

The concept behind Experience Premchit is unique, in that it brings together all aspects of a wellness retreat – nutrition, spa therapy, and exercise – but with the added benefit that comes with experiencing a variety of new and interesting places. Experience Premchit wellness retreats are currently being held at the über-luxurious Paresa in Phuket, while other destinations such as Hua Hin, Krabi, Chiang Mai, Koh Samui, Bangkok and the Maldives will soon be added to the list. Only careful-

ly chosen resorts will host Experience Premchit wellness retreats, to ensure a successful synergy between the resort's ethos and Premchit's own philosophy.

Softly spoken with a delicate beauty, Premchit's personal story is remarkable. As she explains, her philosophy is not based simply on the latest trend towards natural living, but on a lifestyle that has been nurtured in her family through the generations. Others may try to emulate these same ideas, but Premchit's authenticity stands alone.



FROM LEFT: Premchit's soak collection.

"It all began around 420 years ago," she explains. "In 1592 my ancestor, the King of Chalang (Phuket) began to trade natural aromatic plant products such as resins and wood-oils with Sir James Lancaster, who later went on to establish the British East India Company."

Premchit continues, "For 200 years my family traded natural aromatic plant products with the British East India Company, including my ancestor Thao Thep Kasattri, the heroine of the battle of Thalang (Phuket) in 1785, who supplied Sir Francis Light with ambergris, genipa, incense pine, Kananga, palm oils, pearls, saffron, sandalwood, wood oils and wood resins."

"My family has been growing, trading, studying, us-

ing and dispensing indigenous plants and traditional knowledge for beauty, medicinal, nutritional and perfumery benefits for more than twelve generations. My mother and father have passed all they know of our family's ancestral wisdom and secrets of indigenous plants and traditional beauty, health and nutrition practices to me."

Premchit formally pursued her passion in natural health by earning her international certification in aromatherapy from the International Federation of Aromatherapists in London. By all accounts, she has excellent culinary and perfumery skills, and is the creator of bespoke perfumes for private clients using natural ingredients. Little wonder then, the word 'alchemist' and the name Premchit are often used in the same sentence.

It is common, with the trend towards all things natural, for many spa and aromatherapy products to be made with synthetic ingredients. It of-



FROM LEFT: The manual to keep you on track.



FROM LEFT:
The silk covered
box of spa
products given to
every guest.

ten takes a trained nose to be able to ascertain the difference between a fabricated version, and the genuine product. It goes without saying that Premchit uses only ingredients of the highest quality in her aromatherapy products, and the proof lies in the fact that her products actually work. She painstakingly sources natural ingredients from all corners of the globe, including such faraway places as Madagascar, and then blends the oils herself. The nurture and care she puts into her creations is evident in the final result. Quite literally, the products are good enough to eat!

Through a combination of elixirs, ambrosias and therapies, Experience Premchit wellness retreats are designed to bring together all aspects of Premchit's wealth of knowledge and experience. Premchit has created a special range of spa products for use exclusively at her retreats, and these are presented to each guest in a beautiful coffret covered in handmade silk from Northern Thailand: in itself, a wonderful memento of Thailand and its culture.

Each Experience Premchit wellness retreat includes over three hours of spa treatments for each guest per day, enough to satisfy even the most dedicated spa aficionado. Instruction in movement therapy (yoga) and meditation, amongst other life skills, are also offered at the retreats. No detail has been spared in the accoutrements provided to guests: everything from detailed written notes on Premchit's recipes, to an iPod containing specially selected music therapy tracks.

An important part of Experience Premchit wellness retreats is that guests have an opportunity to try the same traditional recipes Premchit learned from her own mother. Interestingly, the recipes all use everyday ingredients that can

be found anywhere in the world, making it easy for guests to recreate their Premchit experience when they return home. Premchit herself is always on hand to provide each guest with tailor-made recommendations for any health or lifestyle concerns they may have.

Far from being a boot-camp style of health retreat, the philosophy of Experience Premchit is that guests should enjoy 'wellness within a vacation'. Plenty of unstructured time is included in the retreat programme, so guests can enjoy their own leisure activities or learn a new skill as part of their "me" time. There are no draconian dietary restrictions at the retreats, either. Premchit's guests can still enjoy alcohol, coffee and salt – often considered contraband at other health retreats – although moderation is recommended.

For Premchit herself, the most important part of her work is the opportunity to share her knowledge with others, and to keep her family legacy alive. "I have lived for wellness since I was very young," she says thoughtfully. "When I was five years old, every weekend my father would take me to

the forest and teach me all about the different types of plants. Health and natural products have always been my passion." There was a time in her life, she says, when she started using commercial soap products, but allergies soon led her back to natural alternatives.

Now that Premchit has a young son of her own, she is hoping to pass on her family traditions to the next generation. "I try to raise my son the natural way," she says. "I don't want to force him to take over the business, but I will simply give him the knowledge and explain 'why.'" Although only seven years old, Premchit's son is showing promise and already shares some of the same passions as his mother. "He likes cooking, and he especially enjoys helping me to blend the oils. He is interested in everything I do."

In Premchit's own words, "The best advice I can give is to learn my family's recipes, in order to live longer and healthier in daily life. There is no need for medicines and colonics – eating plants can restore everyone's natural, healthy balance." ■