



## Living the spa high life

SPA WRITER RACHAEL OAKES-ASH TAKES A THREE-DAY RETREAT HIGH ABOVE MELBOURNE'S CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT AT AUSTRALIA'S FIRST TRUE RESIDENTIAL SPA.

It has been three days since I left the cocoon that is Melbourne's Crown Metropolis ISIKA spa. My entire past 72 hours have been spent on the 26th and 27th floor of Crown's latest hotel venture. The Melbourne streets could have been frozen over by a freak snowstorm and I wouldn't have known, or cared.

Australia's first true residential spa, ISIKA, is the reason for my hermit status. Residential spas first made their name in Asia when the Hyatt Group opened the Japanese-inspired Plateau Spa in the Grand Hyatt Hong Kong, the six Tony Chi-designed garden rooftop villas known as i.sawan at Grand Hyatt Erawan in Bangkok and also in Thailand, the Barai in Hua Hin's Hyatt hotel.

The residential spa concept is simple. Guests stay in dedicated residential spa suites with direct access to the day spa, pool and fitness facilities. Many residential spas offer treatments in the guest room itself and all have a full spa cuisine menu for guests wishing to cleanse their bodies while they

indulge in pampering. Think of it like an urban health and lifestyle retreat, ideal for business executives wanting to retain their health during a stressful corporate trip or those wanting to combine city shopping and spa.

ISIKA's 12 spa guest rooms on the hotel's 26th floor have private direct access to the day spa via a sweeping stairway draped in flowing fabrics. My suite sits on the corner with floor to ceiling views on two sides from the bay to the Dandenong Mountain Range, Aromatherapy Associates skincare products in the bathroom and organic juices in the mini bar. The colour palette is soothing in soft shades of grey and muted mauve and at this level looking out I feel suspended on air.

I've chosen a three-day pampering and fitness retreat designed to de-stress and kick the winter blues. My retreat starts with a consultation with staff member Grant in the spa's greeting room that comes with fresh herbal teas, lemon water and bowls of minty green apples. Grant will be taking me through my paces with a personal training session each day in the gym but first I

must be "intuitively healed" by Gisele.

I had heard about Gisele Faddoul from the hotel's General Manager, Harley Moraitis; a man more suited to Hermes than healing. The style-meister gentleman is a recent convert to all things spa and is clearly enamoured by Gisele's pampering powers but as a spa writer, I have had my share of alternative "healing".

I've been doused in ancient mud, smeared with indigenous clay said to heal the soul and had crystals strapped to my chakras but Gisele is the real deal; a compassionate therapist with a true gift. After two hours of the lightest touch that sends me into a deep relaxation she reveals things about me that only I could have known. There were tears: mine. I feel cleansed and lighter as I float into the private steam shower in the therapy room.

Gordon Ramsay is known more for his hot head in the kitchen than his personable soul but with three Michelin stars under his belt you can be guaranteed the spa cuisine at ISIKA is far from carrot sticks and water. Ramsay is the genius behind maze restaurant and maze





Grill at the hotel and has put his name, along with executive chef Josh Emmett, to the spa cuisine menu too.

Breakfast is served each day in the hotel's exclusive Level 28, a club-style floor with wrap around views of the rising sun as dawn breaks over the Melbourne skyline. Lunch and dinner can be taken in the privacy of the residential suite, in the relaxation room of the spa or on the sun drenched indoor terrace behind the spa reception.

Expect watermelon, feta and avocado salad that dissolves in the mouth and is good for the thighs. Prawn and miso salads, smoked fillet of kingfish, grilled poussin with lemon and harissa and Pimms with blood orange sorbet are also on the menu.

Grant is an attentive trainer and our fitness sessions come with a laugh. The gym is extensive with an impressive array of cardio equipment, free weights and resistance machines. If I was inclined to swim, which I'm not, then I could do laps in the indoor infinity pool that gives swimmers the impression of floating over the Melbourne CBD. Instead I spend my time in the women's vitality

pool and steam room promoting a healthy detox while massaging my weary muscles.

The award winning UK brand, Aromatherapy Associates, is exclusively available at ISIKA and focuses on essential oils for beauty and body treatments. The Damask Rose is ISIKA's signature treatment oil and I spend two hours taking in the body exfoliation and wrap treatment in the retreat's premium therapy room complete with private steam room and vitality tub on day one and a Damask Rose facial on day two. Both treatments predictably send me into la la land. With all this exercise, good food and pampering it's no surprise I'm sleeping like a baby.

The beauty of ISIKA is its design. It's set behind two giant doors that lead to a den of rooms dedicated to personal rejuvenation led by a team of spa therapists who address every client's whim. This is high-end spa retreating in serious style with leaf motifs, textured walls, plush carpets and artistic design.

Come day three and I reluctantly re-enter the world, exiting the hotel at ground level still wishing I was living the spa high life 26 floors above. ■

## DETAILS

**WHAT:** Three-day urban spa retreat  
**WHERE:** ISIKA Residential Spa at the Crown Metropol, 8 Whiteman Street, Southbank Melbourne Victoria 3006  
**WEB:** [www.crownmetropol.com.au](http://www.crownmetropol.com.au)  
**RATES:** A three-night retreat including accommodation in a residential spa suite, all spa meals, an aromatherapy massage, body polish treatment, health and fitness consultation, reflexology treatment and access to day spa facilities, gym, pool and steam area is A\$1,580 single occupancy and A\$2,080 double occupancy.

- 1 Pool on 27th floor
- 2 Vitality Pool
- 3 The Crown Metropol
- 4 Day beds beside the ISIKA pool
- 5 ISIKA Luxe room
- 6 Steam room
- 7 Bathroom in the Crown Metropol
- 8 ISIKA bath