



SPA-RIFIC

Follow in the footsteps of celebs by indulging in some 'me' time in Miami.

by ROWENA CARR-ALLINSON

Jennifer Lopez has called it “the steamiest, sexiest city in America”. And she was right... Miami is hot! The vibrant city in Florida, USA, has long been known for its tropical climate, never-ending beaches and crazy nightlife. Added to that, Miami has now established itself as a destination for

Keeping zen at the Mandarin Oriental Spa

culture, shopping and hip hotels, not to mention a selection of spas in a city that’s pushing the limits of luxury and design.

Intrigued by Hollywood A-listers’ love affair with plush pampering, I set out to indulge in the best spas that Miami has to offer. After all, if they’re good enough for J-Lo and Jennifer Aniston, they’re certainly good enough for me.

travel escapes



THE VICEROY

www.viceroymiami.com

The new Viceroy Hotel in Brickell – the trendy skyscraper district in downtown Miami – is home to one of the city’s most luxurious spas: a 28 000 square foot Philippe Starck-designed extravaganza. Unlike anything I’d seen before, this spa is art. The reception desk overlooks the central spa area, a 5 000 square foot water lounge, reflecting pond, and hot and cold plunge pools, with rococo-style furniture in silver, gold and white that is both functional and fabulous.

Making your way to the change rooms is a trip on its own: it’s a lush descent down a purple-carpeted staircase, past photographic wallpaper that features pictures of bathing beauties from the ’50s. As for the 10 treatment rooms, or white pods, Roman curtains conceal dark and cosy interiors – a cave-like escape I’m happy to disappear into.

I’m booked in for Raindrop Therapy, intrigued by the name. Designed to release blockages and align energy, the treatment is an hour-and-a-half’s worth of total body bliss. Essential oils like peppermint, basil and thyme are sprinkled onto the spine and massaged in to stimulate the central nervous system. The pressure is perfect all the way through, except when it gets to my toes and triggers a giggle.

While I wasn’t lucky enough to see any celebs on my visit, one visitor recently shared a Eucalyptus Steam Room session with Jennifer Lopez, a regular guest at the hotel and fan of the stylish spa.



MANDARIN ORIENTAL SPA

www.mandarinoriental.com

Around the corner from the Viceroy, the super-swish Mandarin Oriental has pampered the likes of Jennifer Aniston, a fan of their Time Rituals treatment; and Penelope Cruz, who chose to indulge in deep tissue massage. And who can blame them... Light infuses the large spa suites that each come with sunken baths, a chaise longue and exotic touches like bamboo décor, butterfly print silks and hot pink orchids that carefully reflect the spa’s Asian theme.

After being assessed to establish which element – Earth, Metal, Water, Wind or Fire – is most relevant to me at the time of my visit, I meet my therapist for the morning. Signature Spa Therapies are tailored specifically to the individual, blending traditional Chinese medicine and aromatherapy. My results indicate the Earth element, which helps you to feel focussed and peaceful, is out of kilter... Time to get centred.

A footbath and heavenly massage later, Tibetan bells chime to signal the start of the treatment. I’ve chosen from five essential oils and my therapist’s healing hands go straight to work – although I find myself surprised to experience pain in odd spots of my body, like the soles of my feet. She explains that according to Chinese medicine’s meridians, these spots are the points that represent stomach and spleen, both tied to the Earth element. After another massage and some hot stone therapy, I feel like a new woman with a invigorating spring in my step.

CANYON RANCH
SOUTH BEACH

www.canyonranch.com

After being treated like a VIP at the Viceroy and Mandarin Oriental Spas, I head up Collins Avenue to the Canyon Ranch, just a few minutes away from the buzz of South Beach. The holistic lifestyle spa brand has been a long-time favourite with Hollywood types, especially the Ranch's original retreat in Arizona, where everyone from Oprah to Madonna have taken a time-out.

Their latest haven in Miami Beach is the city's largest spa and runs along the same strict wellness principles as the one in Arizona. If you ask me, spas should be all about pampering and feeling good, so the clinical-style detox spa with a reputation for being 'serious' had me feeling anxious. Would they make me feel guilty about my weight or the way I fail to exercise regularly? I'd heard they had bent the rules for Mickey Rourke, who recently spent time at the Ranch with his beloved Chihuahua, but then again, I didn't have his CV.

No time to fret, though, with so many activities on offer. I'm quickly impressed by the Aquavana experience, of which Canyon Ranch is extremely proud. A voyage through temperatures and experiences, I go for the Experiential Rain Showers option and try all three settings: Caribbean Monsoon, Polar Mist and Atlantic Storm. It feels odd at first, but strangely soothing. As I stand under the water, I shut my eyes and try 'play the game'. It works. Before

long, the sounds of the rainforest make my tension slip away and I feel myself being transported to Costa Rica... Well, almost.

There's also a Crystal Steam Room and Herbal Laconium, which I fall in love with instantly. The mosaic-tiled room is slightly reminiscent of a Hammam, a mild sauna with a fantastic aroma. For something cool, the Arctic Mist shower sprays out a fine minty haze, but I soon hop out and back into the warm safety of the Laconium.

Once dried and refreshed, I sip on a glass of warm peach tea and await Maura – my Transformation Facial therapist. She tells me off for having dehydrated skin. I blame air travel, jet lag, and sampling Miami's nightlife, secretly feeling guilty for not taking better care of myself.

The facial, I'm told, is more about results than relaxation. Maura applies Canyon Ranch's products containing ProNAD, a patented time-release form of niacin, which is absorbed by the skin to rebuild healthy cells. She also uses Ceraplex, a skin-identical ceramide to boost moisture retention and AntiOx3 antioxidants. She then warns me there might be some redness due to the vitamin B, and there is! I start to look like I've been in the sun for too long and my cheeks tingle, but my skin is plump and glossy and feels regenerated.

Next up is Yoga At Dawn – one of 250 different classes included in the room price, covering every activity possible from boxing and beach walks to 'buff ballet booty'. A total yoga virgin, I'm nervous, but a good night's sleep in a plush bed has me on full

alert. Luckily, only three people are around to see my first attempt on the mat.

Jessie, the spectacularly bendy instructor with a perfect Miami smile says the class is 'for all levels.' I'm dubious. We start off with easy meditation focussing on our third eye, followed by stretching, breathing and only then, does the hard part begin. My unflexible limbs begin to burn. I manage the 'plank', 'cobra' and 'downward dog' positions, but, with each repetition, things become tougher. If this is a beginner's class, I'm in trouble.

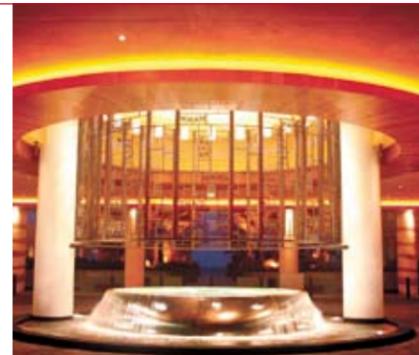
An hour in, we break and adopt the 'child' position. With my head against the mat, I finally relax and silently pray for Jessie to slow the pace. As we move through the poses, she goes for broke grabbing her toe, raising it to her knee and stretching out to form a perfect 'Y'. Surely this is not for beginners? I don't even try...

By the time we finish, I feel energised and good about myself. I resolve to do more regular exercise and start taking yoga lessons. It seems the Canyon Ranch's positive wellness attitude has worked its magic on me. Little wonder then that celebs look so good – going to the spa, Miami-style. ■

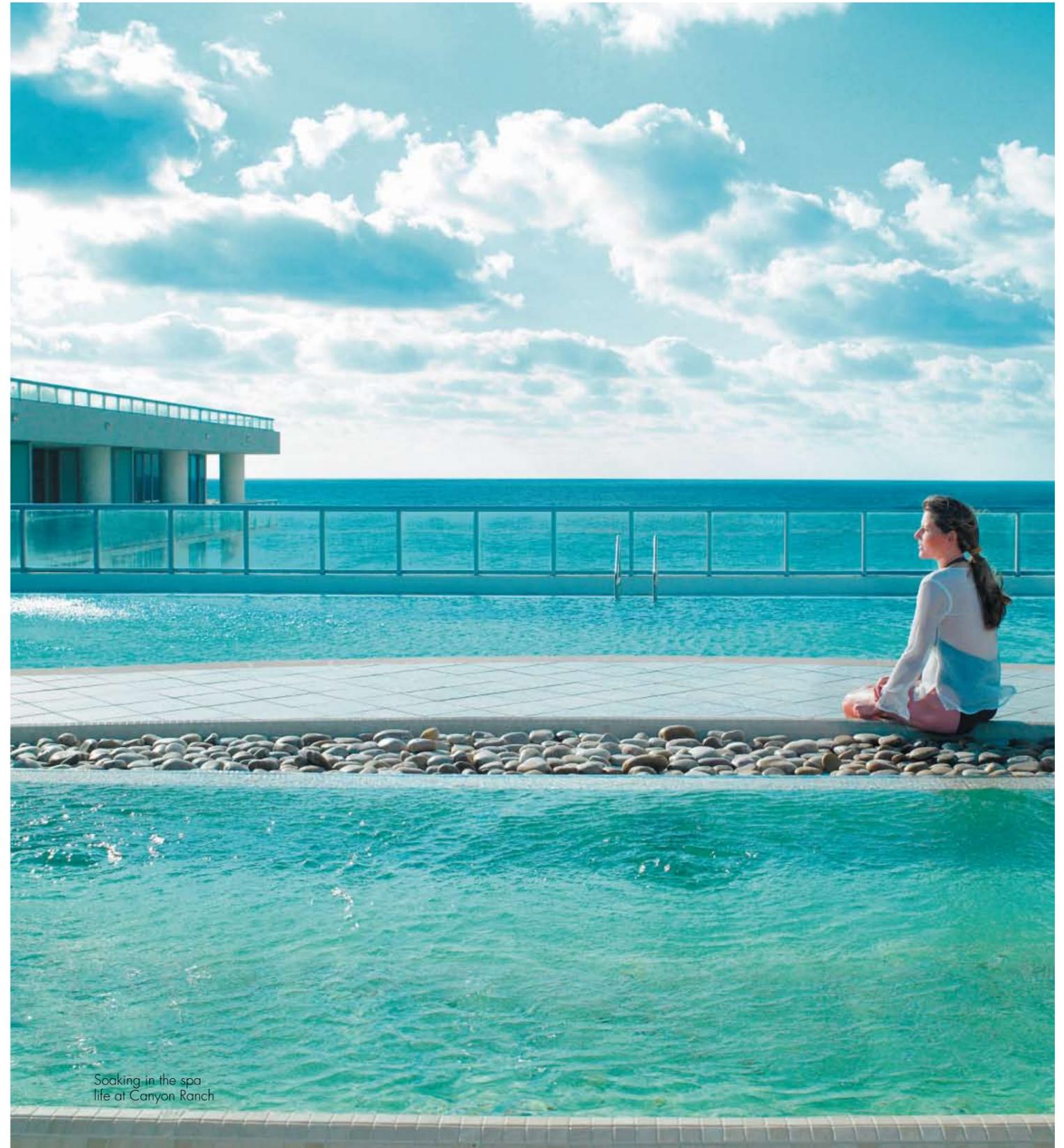
Rowena Carr-Allinson has been a freelancer for five years – writing for the likes of *Elle* to *Harpers, OK!* to *London's Metro*. She started out at the *Financial Times* in the UK, did a stint as a football reporter, then produced at LivingTV and Sony.



The grand 150-room Canyon Ranch features two pools, state of the art cardio training studio, 750 feet of wild beachfront and a restaurant, offering all organic dishes, including the wine. And, of course, there's the 70 000 square foot spa.



BEACH PIC: MOWGLI FRERE



Soaking in the spa life at Canyon Ranch