

Mind your chakras

Whether you're after a luxury spin on '70s spirituality or a high-tech approach to tradition, the biggest wellness trends require an open mind and a healthy dose of scepticism, writes **Anne Fullerton**.

"WELLNESS" IS a divisive concept. Is it a much-needed escape hatch from an age of constant digital noise or, as American actress Hari Nef quipped, "a thing that upper-class white women in their 30s invented in order to battle invisible demons that don't exist"? Whatever your position, the world of wellness is a very visible \$US3.7 trillion global industry, with wellness tourism growing more than twice as fast as tourism in general. According to industry body the Global Wellness Institute, a great deal of that expansion is happening in alternative therapies. "Things that felt so hippie-ish and '70s are now absolutely the No. 1 wellness trend in the West," says the institute's director of research and PR, Beth McGroarty. "The more kooky or wacky the treatment, the bigger it is." Here's a teaser.

Crystal light bed therapy

Forget a balanced diet. These days it's all about balanced chakras – or is that energy fields? Don't get too hung up on the details because everyone from Adele to Victoria Beckham is embracing the pleasing aesthetic and purported healing properties of precious stones.

Crystal light bed therapy, which involves lying on a massage table beneath seven rainbow-coloured Vogel-cut quartz crystals (one for each chakra), first emerged in Brazil's John of God healing community. More recently, it has captured the attention of SoCal yogis and East Coast fashionistas, who will gladly shell out \$US120 (about \$150) a pop for a restorative session.

According to Modrn Sanctuary (modrnsanctuary.com), a luxury wellness centre in Manhattan that specialises in the practice, the crystals "shine on/off in healing rhythms to cleanse, balance and align your energies".

If nothing else, they'll look great on your Instagram feed.

Infra-red saunas

The oldest known sauna is just a pit of stones in Finland but over the past two millennia, this ancient tradition has undergone multiple face lifts. The latest and trendiest incarnation uses infra-red light waves to create heat in the body instead of in the air. The lower temperatures mean you can stay in there for longer – all the better for treating everything from high

blood pressure to arthritis, if you believe its devotees.

Model Miranda Kerr has an infra-red sauna in her guesthouse but the rest of us can sweat in style at Nimbus & Co. (nimbusco.com.au) at Sydney's Bondi Beach.

Cult fitness

The latest status workouts are about more than rock-hard abs – they're about spirituality *and* rock-hard abs. In New York and Los Angeles, The Class by Taryn Toomey (taryntoomey.com) combines a vigorous workout with "clearing your space" (read: burpees with a side of cathartic screaming).

But for the real new-wave experience, spend a day in LA's Runyon Canyon, hiking and breathing heavily with The Wildfire Initiative (thewildfireinitiative.com), a fitness club led by four gym bros who offer "cutting-edge presence training to usher in a new era of awareness and to manifest the great reality". Meet-ups are free to attend and happen every Sunday so there's no need to feel intimidated. Remember, they're just your average collection of actors, models and Olympians getting outdoors, enjoying one another's company and fine-tuning their perfect torsos.

Vinotherapy

"The old model of excess, the party mentality, is not as affordable for people any more," says McGroarty, citing a new, health-conscious breed of millennial traveller as an emerging force in the industry. That said, excess always finds a way and it doesn't get more

wonderfully excessive than sipping a glass of wine while soaking in a bath of wine – you know, for the anti-ageing properties.

French beauty brand Caudalie was the first to spruik the skin-softening properties of grape seed polyphenols but today you can soak in a vat of vino everywhere from Italy to Japan.

Salt therapy

Let's get this out of the way: there's no scientific evidence that sitting in a room built from salt blocks will improve the symptoms of asthma, arthritis, eczema or any other ailment – except, perhaps, an electrolyte deficiency (in which case, licking the walls may help). Then again, one look at the salt chamber in the luxurious spa at Sirene Luxury Hotel Bodrum (hotel.qantas.com.au/sirenebodrum), on Turkey's idyllic Aegean coast, will see you checking any reservations at the door.

Sound bathing

Bizarre name aside, sound bathing, which involves relaxing to the sounds of Tibetan singing bowls or bowls made of quartz crystal, may serve as a useful meditation technique for novices who struggle to reach nirvana through breathwork alone. Think of it as meditating to a soundtrack.

In Southern California's Mojave Desert, taking a sound bath in the Integratron (integratron.com) – a domed structure described by its creator as "a time machine for basic research on rejuvenation, anti-gravity and time travel" – will transport you to another world before you even close your eyes. ●

