



Soul vacation – Bangkok wellness retreats

Meet two women who are creating a holistic community within Bangkok's bustling metropolis

by Lori Blackburn

My year was passing in an energetic blur. Suddenly it was September. I was exhausted. My life was full of exciting times, but also heavy, unexpected family obligations. Perhaps you can relate to my situation. After months of back-to-back business travel, work demands, and frantic daily life I was beyond burnt out. Additionally, after living in Bangkok for over two years, I was ready for a new direction. It was time for change.

Initially, I joined a Fill your cup retreat (www.taketimetobeyou.com/fill-your-cup.html) simply because it was fun. I thought that a day retreat conveniently located within Bangkok led by two ladies who create quality experiences would be nice. What started

as a casual commitment led to an eye-opening day.

The retreat coaches, Jennifer Chapman and Carolina Herrera, began Fill your cup urban

retreats to support women in creating more fulfilling lives. While their personal stories resonate with many people, their work creates opportunities to relax and rejuvenate. It is also a great time. The venue for these ongoing retreats is Ariyasom Villas (www.ariyasom.com), a boutique hotel originally built in 1941 as an ancestral home. The retreats are an opportunity to recharge and connect with a community of lovely ladies.

When I stepped through the gates of Ariyasom Villas, the traffic, noise, and outside world disappeared. I had entered the lush gardens of a grand heritage home. Was this still Bangkok? The staff



greeted me with smiles. I walked to the library in awe of the environment that Jennifer and Carolina had carefully created within the villa's antique ambiance. Sure, I had seen pictures of their previous retreats, but I was floored by this setting. Colourful cushions, delicious tea service, flowers, and cosy-chic sitting areas awaited. Was that incense I smelled? Everyone was so nice. I relaxed into the tranquility where old world charm met retreat day wellness. It was time to drop in.

During the retreat, Carolina's coaching workshops helped us reconnect with our inner spark. She also shared strategies for personal



EXPAT LIFE

IN THAILAND

Dec / Jan 2020

250B

lifestyle . travel . education . nutrition . health . tourism . retirement . relationships

**The Egyptian
Ambassador
to Thailand**

**Thailand makes
history with
the FEI**

**The creation of
Thammachart
Seafood**

Acts of kindness

**Wellness,
wellbeing and
mindfulness**

**Christmas
markets in
Germany**

**Meet the Head
of School**



ENGAGE AND CONNECT:



Web: www.expatlifethailand.com



[expatlifethailand](https://www.facebook.com/expatlifethailand)



Email: subscribe@elbkk.com



Instagram: [@expatlifethailand](https://www.instagram.com/expatlifethailand)



Twitter: [@ExpatLifeThai](https://twitter.com/ExpatLifeThai)



Soul vacation – Bangkok wellness retreats

Meet two women who are creating a holistic community within Bangkok's bustling metropolis

by Lori Blackburn

My year was passing in an energetic blur. Suddenly it was September. I was exhausted. My life was full of exciting times, but also heavy, unexpected family obligations. Perhaps you can relate to my situation. After months of back-to-back business travel, work demands, and frantic daily life I was beyond burnt out. Additionally, after living in Bangkok for over two years, I was ready for a new direction. It was time for change.

Initially, I joined a Fill your cup retreat (www.taketimetobeyou.com/fill-your-cup.html) simply because it was fun. I thought that a day retreat conveniently located within Bangkok led by two ladies who create quality experiences would be nice. What started

as a casual commitment led to an eye-opening day.

The retreat coaches, Jennifer Chapman and Carolina Herrera, began Fill your cup urban

retreats to support women in creating more fulfilling lives. While their personal stories resonate with many people, their work creates opportunities to relax and rejuvenate. It is also a great time. The venue for these ongoing retreats is Ariyasom Villas (www.ariyasom.com), a boutique hotel originally built in 1941 as an ancestral home. The retreats are an opportunity to recharge and connect with a community of lovely ladies.

When I stepped through the gates of Ariyasom Villas, the traffic, noise, and outside world disappeared. I had entered the lush gardens of a grand heritage home. Was this still Bangkok? The staff



greeted me with smiles. I walked to the library in awe of the environment that Jennifer and Carolina had carefully created within the villa's antique ambiance. Sure, I had seen pictures of their previous retreats, but I was floored by this setting. Colourful cushions, delicious tea service, flowers, and cosy-chic sitting areas awaited. Was that incense I smelled? Everyone was so nice. I relaxed into the tranquility where old world charm met retreat day wellness. It was time to drop in.

During the retreat, Carolina's coaching workshops helped us reconnect with our inner spark. She also shared strategies for personal





growth. This was complimented by Jennifer's holistic offerings of outdoor yoga, gong bath meditation, and yin yoga stretches. A tasty vegetarian lunch was served at the award-winning Na Aroon restaurant. At the day's end, we left feeling lighter, more vibrant, inspired, and empowered. Thank goodness I had joined! I had not realised how much I needed this retreat. I gained a clearer idea on how to lead a more meaningful life which aligned with my goals. I also met a new circle of wonderful women.

Expat life creates unique situations. Thankfully, Bangkok has resources to help us balance wellness with daily life. In addition to Fill your cup retreats, Carolina and Jennifer have each created holistic spaces for people to recharge within Bangkok's fast-paced world. For those seeking community and wellness, these gals have something to share.

Carolina Herrera

Women's coach and mentor.

Creator of the Take time to be you practice.

<https://www.facebook.com/taketimetobeyou/>

Jennifer Chapman

Yoga teacher and sound therapist.

Founder of The Green Room Bangkok.

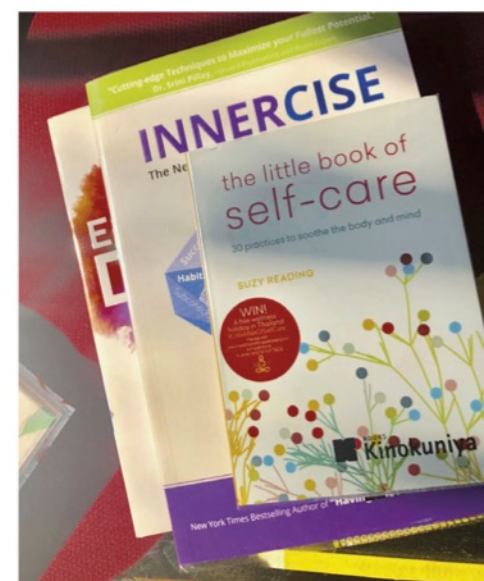
<https://www.facebook.com/thegreenroombangkok/>

Jennifer Chapman shares how a career as a top dancer in the entertainment industry led to her holistic work in yoga, meditation, and mindfulness coaching.

Hi, I'm Jen. I began The Green Room Studio in Bangkok (www.facebook.com/thegreenroombangkok/) to grow a community of like-minded people. We share my home space for yoga and relaxing sound baths. I offer classes to anyone interested in exploring yoga and wellbeing, regardless of prior experience. In today's frenetic world, I encourage visitors to explore the art of slowing down so that they can connect to their

mind, body, and heart.

Carolina and I began retreats to create a nurturing place for women to initiate positive changes. I recently worked with Carolina on my own life coaching. After experiencing a beneficial shift thanks to her Rapid Transformational Therapy and Take time to be you programme, I wanted other women to experience this alongside my holistic offerings.



So, how did I turn a glamorous dance career into a grounded holistic practice? Let me explain my journey. I was born in the United Kingdom. I lived in London for fifteen years during my career as a professional dancer and choreographer. Three years ago, I moved to Asia where I lived in Kuala Lumpur and now in Bangkok. Bangkok has so much to offer. You can live on a shoestring budget or splurge on the high life.





Speak kinder to ourselves and appreciate what we have, happiness can prevail. We can walk an empowering path rather than fall victim to life's challenges.

Thankfully, I found yoga. This was a turning point. Yoga began a journey away from my performance career and towards an interest in holistic wellbeing. Initially, I was drawn to yoga's physical aspects. Soon, my desire for stronger emotional health developed into a meditation and gratitude practice. This fostered my deep respect for yoga philosophy. I completed several yoga teacher training courses, the first being in Goa, India. My education has since expanded to becoming a mindfulness educator as well as reiki and sound therapy practitioner.

I love Bangkok's plant-based restaurants, cafes, co-working spaces, massages, parks, and people. To connect us all, Facebook provides a great platform to learn about events. There's literally something happening every day that I want to join!

In school, I prioritised academics, but my passion was a dance career rather than any high-flying corporate job. I followed my heart and was fortunate to experience over ten rich, diverse years performing with world renowned artists such as Take That, Coldplay, Rhianna, JayZ, and Elton John. I performed on international tours, live TV shows, award ceremonies, commercials, and feature films. A highlight was working as a core dance captain for the London Olympic closing ceremonies in 2012. My dance career took me around the world.

I had my dream job, but along with the exciting highs came the inevitable lows – physical injuries, feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and low self-esteem from the pressure. The entertainment industry was exciting, but intense. During these demanding years, stress and life got the better of me. I had no emotional resilience. I would often react rather than respond to situations.

Eventually, I realised that I could change my life. I already had the tools to make positive changes – we all do! The problem is that we look outside of ourselves to create our reality and happiness. Once we reframe our perspective to

My holistic work takes several forms. As a yoga teacher, I focus on calming the nervous system and promoting a healthy and mobile body. As a mindfulness teacher I offer children strategies to help them understand themselves and their place in this world. Mindful Sparks is a company I co-created with a lovely lady called Lilly. Our curriculum operates in Bangkok in international schools. As a sound therapist, I offer people an opportunity to rest and rejuvenate through the ancient practice of sound vibrations that heal on a cellular level. Finally, to satisfy my creativity and love of fabrics, I make meditation cushions and eye pillows.

Outside of my business ventures, I create plant-based foods, go swing dancing at The Hop, or meet like-minded souls at Bangkok's many great events. Although I don't have my own children, I am lucky to have many little ones in my life. I teach dance and yoga at St. Andrews International School and at The Little Pea at The Commons.

Fill your cup retreat

Ariyasom Villas is a sanctuary that is homey yet exotic. When considering how to plan a retreat, I think about what I would want from this type of day. The restaurant, Na Aroon, serves superb vegetarian food. We are grateful to use the multiple private spaces – the library, yoga sala, and Buddhist meditation hall. Depending upon what inspires our





guests, they can lounge outside on my handmade cushions. They can also sit within the vintage library surrounded by books and traditional Thai décor.

The morning yoga session

This yoga practice focuses upon carefully and consciously opening the body according to each person's level of yoga. Helpful props are provided. Guests can modify poses to what feels good. I tailor the morning yoga practice to suit the day's themes. Since September's retreat focused upon actions to ignite the last three months of 2019, the yoga sequence worked towards backbends which have an energising quality. It feels good to marry the coaching activities with the yoga class.

A good yoga class leaves us feeling refreshed and peaceful. At Ariyasom Villas, we practice outside on an elevated yoga sala surrounded by trees. For me, that's the cherry on the top! Our wellbeing improves by spending time in nature. Our brains, bodies, emotions, thought processes, and social interactions benefit from being outdoors. I love Ariyasom Villa's yoga sala. The gentle fans keep us cool, the beautiful flags frame the space, and the garden backdrop adds a magical touch.

The sound bath

In the afternoon, we are treated to Ariyasom Villas' beautiful Buddhist meditation hall. There are high ceilings, an inspiring altar, and plenty of organic, wooden space for us to make cosy nests for the sound bath. A sound bath is named as such because the recipient feels like they are bathed in sound. Rest assured, no water is involved! The instruments' therapeutic vibrations give the recipient a sort of sound massage. I use two Paiste meditation gongs, a selection of Tibetan singing bowls, chimes, and other specialised instruments. Studies have proven that our bodies are affected by sound vibrations at a cellular level. After a sound bath, people often feel a renewed sense of self. They are refreshed and rested.



Though every session is unique, people often feel like a weight has been lifted and replaced with a sense of clarity. There is no effort involved. You simply get comfortable, usually by laying down with pillows, blankets, eye pillows, and bolsters. Then you are free to drift into a peaceful meditative state as I play the instruments. The sound bath culminates the retreat with a peaceful time for deep relaxation and reflection.

Carolina Herrera is a mindful mommy who helps women create a more balanced life through Life Purpose Coaching, Mindfulness, and Rapid Transformational Therapy.

Hola, my name is Carolina Herrera. I am a Rapid Transformational Therapy Practitioner who also works in Life Purpose Life Coaching. To compliment this, I have a background in mindfulness and breath work. I call this the *Take time to be you* practice.

(<http://www.taketimetobeyou.com/>)





London. Before becoming a women's coach, I worked in fundraising for UK charities. I have lived in Asia for the past ten years. After living in Singapore for eight years, my husband's coffee roasting business and café, Sarnies, brought us to Bangkok two years ago. My husband's creative spark and determination to create a life balanced by work and play inspires me every day. We are blessed with two children: eleven year old Santi and three year old Luna. Our family has also lived in Sydney, Buenos Aires, and London. It seems like we are slowly covering all the continents! Next year, I will celebrate my 40th birthday. I feel grateful for all the lessons that I have learned.

I love Bangkok. It is a city of amazing contrasts. Thai people are warm and kind. There are always interesting events happening. I love the diverse co-working spaces. There is a thriving café scene as well as many cool restaurant and bars. The whole city is alive.

About seven years ago, self-care saved my life! I had the "perfect life" in Singapore, but I felt like life was happening to me. I wasn't taking charge. I needed to reconnect with my essence and figure out who I wanted to be, especially after having kids. This began my journey of self-discovery.

I am passionate about helping women find their spark and reconnect with themselves. I understand how it feels to lose sight of yourself. I have been there. Luckily, there are tools to help us reconnect with our spirit and goals.

Some people wonder if I am a life coach, but I am specifically a women's coach. I created the *Take time to be you* practice, a 4 step guided process that helps women become clear on the following: Who they

want to be... Why they want to be that... What they want to do... and How to do more of it. This helps women cultivate more authentic and meaningful lives.

Jennifer and I began the retreats to provide women with an opportunity to reflect and reset. It is a chance to honour our feelings, shift, and take action. Since Jen and my work is complimentary, we designed the retreats as a place for women to nurture their mind, body, and spirit. Many people ask why we created the retreats. Well, I honestly felt that I needed one for myself! From the work that Jen and I do, we also knew that other women sought a safe space to embrace mindfulness and consciously choose their own path. Additionally, they wanted to connect with other like-minded women. Our retreats offer an opportunity to build friendships and community. I can understand these feelings because I have wanted the same things.

I'm originally from Colombia, but I grew up in



I realised that self-care was not selfish, but necessary. It enables us to feel good and be our authentic selves.

During this time, I had terrible eczema. It looked like I had been burnt with cigars. It wasn't pretty, but it was my body's way of screaming that I needed to nurture my wellbeing. This is how I learned to be mindful. One big lesson was to listen to my body. Physical ailments are often a manifestation of mental stress. The moment I feel a tingle and itch coming on, I have the awareness to pause and reflect. I ask myself, Hey what do I need right now? Sometimes, I simply need rest. Other times, I watch my diet. Sometimes, I ask for help and acknowledge that I cannot do everything.

I love sharing my journey and lessons. Many women suffer in silence thinking they are the only ones who feel this way. They are not alone. There is a huge element of guilt when it comes to expressing our insecurities about motherhood or about expat life. Friends back home often do not understand what you are complaining about, especially if you are not working full-time and your husband supports the family financially. They are quick to judge, failing to see that it is not all about the money. We are entitled to our feelings. There is no right or wrong. All pain or joy is valid. One of the reasons that I love connecting with other women is that we can create

opportunities to share our stories and grow.

Fill Your Cup Retreat – We chose Ariyasom Villas for its ability to transport people away from city buzz and everyday life. We envisioned a little heaven. When we came across Ariyasom Villas, we knew it was perfect. It is located within the city centre, but still provides a secluded oasis. The hotel staff are amazingly supportive. Their attention to detail is incredible. They gave us multiple private areas. We discussed how to create a safe space for reflective work and connection as well Jen's yoga and sound baths. We made different sitting areas so that women could be alone or chat within a smaller group. Our garden book table became this perfect break out area.

The coaching workshops – Our September retreat, Fill Your Cup: Series 2 focused upon 'how we want to fill our cup'. Our cup is a metaphor for our life. The way we fill our cup is determined by two things: The way we choose to spend our time and who we choose to spend it with. I wanted to bring awareness to this concept. It is easy for daily routines to suck us in so that life becomes automatic. We can exist on autopilot moving from one thing to the next. We forget that we have choices on how to lead our lives. These choices become clear when we take time to truly think about what we want in life.

The Series 2 retreat highlighted how we want to culminate our year. We envisioned how we will feel, what we want our life to be, and what we want to achieve. As entrepreneur and motivational speaker Marie Forleo shares,



"Deciding what you want is the first step towards getting it". This sums up our day. First, we decided what we wanted from the next three months. Next, we clarified why this was important. Then, we acknowledged potential barriers. Finally, we identified the tools to help our journey.

I want to provide women with a chance to connect with their spark. Hopefully, they leave with clarity over what is uniquely important to them. I encourage people to reach out for support. They do not need to go through dark moments alone. For anyone who wants to start their journey of self-discovery but who might not be ready for in-person coaching, I am launching an online, self-paced, self-coaching course. I am happy that there are various options for self-care.

Our next Fill Your Cup women's retreat will be held on December 7, 2019 and then in late January 2020. This provides perfect opportunities to join the group and set intentions for the new year. In between retreats, we organise social gatherings to bring the ladies together. In addition to my coaching options, people can also reach out to Jen through The Green Room Facebook page where she offers weekly yoga and sound bath sessions. Bangkok's bustling city is full of bright lights and energetic adventures, but it also offers heartfelt, healthy, and holistic opportunities. Take time to fill your cup. Cheers!"

