



WHAT'S HOT

The way the villa is positioned, you can see out three windows to bushland without seeing the structure of the baths below or any houses beyond.

NOT HOT

I found a one-night stay too rushed to experience the room and complex in full. Oh, for another few hours to sit on the deck and enjoy the views.



WE STAY AT... The Sanctuary at Alba Thermal Springs

Fingal, Vic

Susan Bugg checks in to a luxe villa for a midweek soak

Thermal bathing is booming, and having visited several springs on busy weekends, my new preference is a still midweek evening. As twilight descends at Alba Thermal Springs & Spa, I rest in warm water, luxuriating in having a pool to myself while watching stars spread across the night sky.

Alba opened on the Mornington Peninsula, one of Victoria's best-known wine and holiday destinations, in October 2022. Its 31 pools set among elegant terraces and landscaped native gardens are popular with day visitors, who complement bathing sessions and spa treatments by dining on a menu created by chef Karen Martini. Last year, the complex added The Sanctuary, five secluded luxury villas, one of which is my home for a night, and two studio rooms, all set high on a ridge above the baths.

THE ARRIVAL

After an 80-minute drive from the Melbourne CBD, check-in is at Alba's main building, a curved structure that melts into the hillside. I meet concierge Hayley, who directs me to a separate driveway that leads to the accommodation; she drives us in a golf cart to show me to Villa 2. Chauffeured carts are on call to shuttle guests between the bathing complex and their lodgings.

THE VILLA

The dark timber exterior of my villa is stylish but low-key. And it opens like an oyster shell to reveal its pearly

interior – the first commercial accommodation project for Peninsula local Kate Walker of KWD, who was tasked with weaving the locale into her design, to connect guests to nature and create a sense of calm.

Curved walls reflect the shape of the bathing complex below and the palette is muted in golden tones like shades of sand. Texture and fibre create interest in a quilted bed cover, matte wall paint and fabric panels, gauze natural drapes, and pendant bedside lamps constructed of painted stainless-steel mesh. Finishes are luxe – the timber floor is light oak and custom-designed dining chairs are upholstered in diamond-patterned Italian velvet matched with a travertine-topped bronze table. A Tasmanian oak timber sofa sits at the end of the king bed.

A Bang & Olufsen Bluetooth speaker sits on a bedside table, and nearby in-wall charging ports are USB-C; no good for my iPhone 14, but after a quick query at reception, I'm loaned a cord that fits.

The villas are designed for winter as well as summer, the highlight being an atmospheric in-built wood fire. I'm staying on a cool night, so about 8pm I give Hayley a call and she comes up to light the fire. The bathroom floor is heated, as is the seat on the toilet, a high-tech Japanese Toto model with all the bells and whistles including bidet functions.

A stone tub with accompanying bath salts invites a soak, and the double rainwater shower and double vanity are equipped with Aesop products. A Dyson hairdryer is at hand, and a door from the bathroom

leads out onto a deck. The complementary minibar is generous, including 10X wine from nearby winery Ten Minutes by Tractor, St Andrews Beach Brewery beers, Peninsula Cold Press Juice, Three Bays water, local chips, pretzels and sweets, T2 tea and Illy coffee pods to use in the supplied coffee maker. I use the small ceramic teapot to brew Alba's own loose-leaf tea blend (lemongrass, pink peppercorns, hibiscus and raspberry).

From top:
One of the five new villas at Alba Thermal Springs & Spa; a pool at the complex.

FOOD AND DRINK

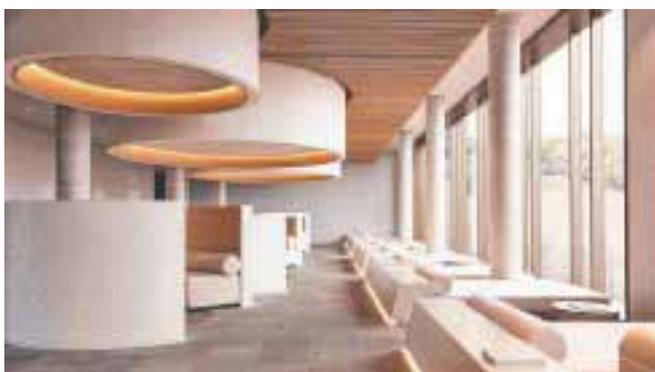
At Thyme, Alba's airy in-house restaurant, the dress code is white robe and thongs/Crocs/ Birkenstocks as couples, woman friends and combos of mums and daughters – some on school holiday treats – enjoy dinner after a soak or spa treatment.

Healthier options on the Asian-leaning menu are numerous, but I opt for one of the more indulgent and popular dishes, the crumbed fish sandwich with shiso and nori tartare, and fries with yuzu mayo. Dishes such as wontons – scallop and prawn in broth – and the red rice with ocean trout were created by Melbourne chef and restaurateur Karen Martini and delivered under the eye of head chef Mario Di Natale. Veuve and an Austrian white aside, the wine is almost exclusively from the plethora of wineries in the region.

EXTRAS

Villas are equipped with board games: backgammon, Bananagrams, playing cards and a box of cards demonstrating yoga poses. Guests also get a 45-minute bathing session or salt float therapy in Alba's private area, The Terrace, plus access to the public baths.

The writer was a guest of Alba Thermal Springs & Spa. Midweek rates for a one-night stay in the two studio rooms start from \$850 per room including breakfast, and villas without a bath from \$1250 per night and villas with a bath \$1400. albathermalsprings.com.au



The spa at Alba Thermal Springs.



THE VERDICT
8.5/10

This high-end stay is the ultimate wellness indulgence.



A bedroom in a Sanctuary villa at Alba Thermal Springs & Spa.