

TRAVEL

You Can Get into Intensive Detoxes

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OM, OM.....OMG the Kamalaya detox. Caroline Phillips aims to balance and revitalise in a spa that's young and sexy but where they say food should be your medicine.

It's time for me to rejuvenate a body more burnt-out than an old firework. Maybe have the opportunity to live on air alone. Or perhaps do the sort of intensive detox that leads, above all, to dreams of meringues and ice cream. You know, a kind of Victoria Beckham diet.

Hang on a moment – before I'm pushed into a week of juice, watered down water or of three anorexic squirrel's meals a day – it's not possible to get through a serious detox without having a dreaded colonic, is it? Maybe even a cappuccino enema. Another hiccup is that I'm not a fan of detox herbal remedies, either. It doesn't take much to realise one thing then: that it's a no to a hard-core detox programme for me (to see how Caroline retoxos after her stay at Kamalaya, see Lusso's article The Great Retox).

One of the biggest growth markets in travel is of people investing in their bodies. And Kamalaya in Koh Samui, Thailand, is one of the planet's – or possibly galaxy's – leading destination spas and the place to invest in my-body-is-my-temple.



Kamalaya offer 70 fitness, weight loss or rejuvenation therapies. There's a stress and burn-out programme that includes Thai and Chinese practices plus Ayurvedic Shirodhara massages (that's the one that involves a continuous stream of warm oil drizzled onto my 'third eye', as if I were a poppadom).

There's also a sleep programme which includes naturopathy, Traditional Chinese Medicine and enough massages to open a parlour. Once I put head to buckwheat pillow, it's hard to remember all the detailszzzzzz.

Kamalaya integrates medical science and Eastern healing traditions – which means there are diagnostic tests and healing hands aplenty: think holistic made hip. There's a crack squad of practitioners...Traditional Chinese Medicine doctors, naturopaths, homeopaths, Ayurvedic therapists, registered nurses, energy healers, an allopathic doctor, Thai therapists and visiting gurus. A kind of Carry on Doctor series *de nos jours*.



There's an infrared sauna that burns 600 calories in 30

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minutes. That's it I have any calories left after climbing the hill every day for meals and treatments.

Kamalaya is a beautiful hillside retreat of swaying palm trees, looming granite boulders and tropical jungle foliage borrowed from a Gauguin painting – with an add-on of landscaped swimming and plunge pools. There are lotus ponds, ginormous orange butterflies, hot pink hibiscus and loads of ribbiting frogs. There's even a herbal steam cavern hewn into the rock and an ancient Buddhist monks' cave. It all puts the ah into spa. Can there be anything better?

Well, yes, it overlooks an aquamarine lagoon and a beach that out-beaches the one in *From Here to Eternity*. Forget Gauguin: this place has been borrowed from a Hollywood studio fantasy landscape with bells and brass knobs on.



It is to Kamalaya that Oliver Stone came for weight loss. Best call him Oliver Lost A Stone now. Fergie went all spiritual here (in her autobiography, *Finding Sarah*, she devotes 35 pages to the retreat. Recalling a meditation session she wrote: 'We sat cross-legged on mats around the fire, with everyone chanting, "Ohm." Ohm indeed). Annie Lennox travelled the world and the seven seas to get here. Add to these slebs a number of stressed-out investment bankers, Ozzies in singlets and CEO's in sarongs, and you get the picture.

There's a programme called 'Balance and Revitalize' – detox lite – which aims to fight modern stresses and combat adrenal burnout. That's what I opt for.

My programme starts with a body bio-impedance analysis – a conspiratorial electronic device which, it's claimed, is there to determine an individual's specific wellness needs, but is probably only there to tell me I need to lose some lard. Beam me up, Scotty. Next I have a naturopathic consultation.



Have trim, fit and with luminous skin

I LEAVE TRIM, FIT AND WITH LUMINESCENT SKIN.

Then it carries on through a detox body scrub, foot massage, head massage, face massage and even intestine massage (it's called Chei Nei Tsing and is a Taoist therapy). There's only a centimeter patch behind my ear that goes unmassaged. I'm saving it for next time. All the treatments work on an energetic, emotional and spiritual level.

Instead of lolling by a pool reading Fifty Shades trilogies, I spend time with Smitha Jayakumar – a monk who lived in a monastery for 10 years and is now a spiritual-life-coach (think Buddhism meets Hinduism and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy). There are no televisions here. If I want Made in Chelsea or Graham Norton, forget it. Instead the waterfalls and ponds are a recording studio for love-lorn frogs – and alongside them packs of local dogs howl at the moon.



Suddenly I hear the siren song of French fries. The lyrical lure of the Mars bar. But it's easier to find a nun in a whore house than a super-size-me anything in Kamalaya. So far so good, for the likes of me – someone who has less discipline than a randy frog and who is wanting to detox (that much said, there's an infrared sauna that burns 600 calories in 30 minutes. That's if I have any calories left after climbing the hill every day for meals and treatments. Go forth and sweat).

The food isn't just for raw-food junkies and lactose, peanut, meat-allergic weirdos. It's spa food that makes me go 'om' and 'ah'. It's deliciously organic, fresh and pleasantly medicinal – but not preachy (I can eat pancakes and chocolate mousse if I want. And, boy, do I want...). The cuisine is based on ancient Asian healing traditions and the latest Western nutritional research Black cod and banana blossom salad. Mieng Kam – fresh green betel leaves with dried coconut, tamarind, ginger and shallots.... It's enough to turn the hardest fast food junkie's heart to tofu.

Kamalaya is young and sexy, in the first flush of youth. It's a spiritual place that favours authenticity over luxury and pampering. It catches me by the toe and pulls me in gently, casting its magic spell slowly. It's so addictive it should be a classified drug. At the end, I'm ready to do everything my team of therapists suggest – as long as it's not a colonic. I leave trim, fit and with luminescent skin. Who wants a week-long detox affair? I'd like this to be a marriage for life.

Caroline Phillips (www.carolinephillips.net) is an award-winning journalist who writes for the glossier glossies and the better nationals. She has written for the Sunday Times, The Times, Observer, Guardian, Independent, Mail on Sunday, Daily Mail and Evening Standard. Additionally she's published in a variety of magazines, from Tatler to Harpers Bazaar and Vanity Fair. She's a consultant for Globalista – website for the discerning traveller – and contributing editor of Country & Town House and of Spear's. She also co-edits the Spear's Spa Guide.

Visit www.kamalaya.com to find out more about the Kamalaya Hotel, Wellness Sanctuary and Holistic Spa Resort, Koh Samui.

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