

## Kamalaya: is this Thailand's best spa?

8 August 2012 by Caroline Phillips

**Its therapies include Chinese medicine, naturopathy and yoga. It's beautiful, upscale and costs £2,500 a week plus. But will it heal you? Caroline Phillips reports**



Get your Om on: healing hands at Kamalaya

Everyone leaves there having made at least one change in their lives. That's what I'm told about Kamalaya health spa in Koh Samui, Thailand. Guests rid themselves of multiple pounds (in weight and currency), have a turn of direction in their heart-attack-headed lives, and rejuvenate bodies more burnt out than a forest fire.

The hottest trend in travel is to invest in your body. And Kamalaya, one of the world's leading destination spas, is the place to do it.

It offers healing hands aplenty and Eastern traditions alongside the best of the West, including state-of-the-art diagnostic procedures. This translates into diverse healing and spiritual approaches: a holistic combo that is targeted at the mind, body and soul.

There is a crack squad of practitioners, encompassing traditional Chinese medicine, naturopathy, homeopathy, Ayurveda and energy healing, as well as registered nurses, an allopathic doctor, Thai therapists and visiting guru types.

### Shoulders and chakras

I'm at Kamalaya to release shoulders that have more knots than a yacht covers in a storm, to catch up on several lifetimes of deprived sleep, and perhaps to buff my soul and open my chakras. My companion, my Ritalin-filled 17-year-old nephew Henry, wants to find alternative approaches to his ADHD (or rather, that's what his mother wants).

The location on its own starts the healing process. The spa is on a hillside of swaying palms and tropical foliage borrowed from a Gauguin painting. It sits beside a crescent-shaped beach and an aquamarine lagoon. It's a Garden of Eden with plants that probably talk, lotus ponds and ginormous orange butterflies

There is a herbal steam cavern hewn into the rock and a Buddhist monks' cave. It's a close to heaven as you can get while still alive.

### Who's here...

Here you'll find the likes of Annie Lennox, Oliver Stone (who lost more than a stone), stressed-out investment bankers and ladies who don't lunch. There are singletons who meet at the dining table for singles, and couples on a health kick. And the hard-core detoxers whose treatments include the dreaded colonics.

Then there's the founders: Karina Stewart, a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine who also trained in anthropology and wafts around on a spiritual cloud dispensing healing energy; and her husband John, a yogi who devoted 16 years to spiritual studies in a Himalayan community.

### ...and what they're doing

The spa offers 70 treatments and programmes, from weight loss to yoga. The latest is the sleep programme, using naturopathy and Chinese therapies to take people to the land of zizz on a buckwheat pillow.

Days are also sugar-free-jam-packed with activities, from aqua aerobics to meditation and Qi Gong. Recalling a meditation session at Kamalaya, Fergie, the Duchess of York, wrote in her memoir: "We sat cross-legged on mats around the fire, with everyone chanting Om." Bring on the incense, bruv.

**“ Black cod and banana blossom salad, where have you been all my life? ”**

The food is organic and fresh, combining ancient Asian healing traditions and the latest Western nutritional research, and including diets derived from Ayurveda and naturopathy. The precept is that when the diet is wrong, medicine is of no use; and when the diet is correct, there's no need for medicine.

The chef works from the belief that we are much more than what we eat – but that what we eat helps us to be more than what we are. It's to this end that the mini-bar contains roasted pumpkin kernels and aloe vera juice.

My programme starts with a body bio-impedance analysis (which measures body composition electronically and rudely informs me on a printout that I'm a little overweight) and after which I have a delicious meal. Black cod and banana blossom salad, where have you been all my life?

I also have a wellness consultation with a naturopath, magic-handed massages (including Chei Nei Tsing, a Taoist tummy massage), and nutritional advice. I spend a particularly interesting hour with Smitha Jayakumar, a one-time Buddhist nun who lived in a monastery for ten years and is now a spiritual life coach.

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All the treatments work on an energetic, emotional and spiritual level. But does it do the trick?

Well, yes and no. I am shadowing Henry (in the interests of journalism and at the instruction of his mother) and writing articles. So I don't really experience the essential switching-off element of the programme.

But by the end there's definitely a spiritual spring in my step and a luminescent quality to my face. Not to mention a trimmer body, achieved partly by so often climbing the hill to the dining area and treatment rooms.

Some people say they leave Kamalaya with reignited spirits and hearts, and with more than Band-Aid to deal with their wounds. We leave feeling healthy, happy and relaxed. (So that's more than one change in our lives, then.)

Most spas claim to make you feel well; Kamalaya actually delivers. It does what it says on the tin. And more.

[See the Kamalaya website](#)

*Caroline flew with Cathay Pacific and Bangkok Airways*

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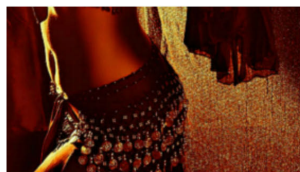


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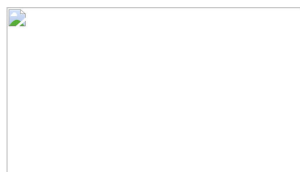


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