



KAMALAYA **WEIGHT LOSS** KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

IN BRIEF Total rejuvenation in a rainforest wonderland

THE LOWDOWN Kamalaya has one of the most stratospheric repeat bookings of any long-haul spa. Try it, love it and you don't have to think about looking anywhere else. If you're coming here for the first time, book in for at least seven nights or 10 if you can. After an 11-hour flight from London, a few hours' layover at Bangkok airport and the hour-long hop to Koh Samui, it's another half-hour in the car before you're sipping a welcome ginger tea. It takes a couple of days to recover, and once you've had a session or two with the astounding yoga teachers, a hard-hitting fitness class or meditation with Rajesh – a former monk so profoundly wise some people book their trips around his availability – you'll be hugging yourself for having extended the bliss. Unlike its lavish counterparts, where there's often a reserved atmosphere, this spa's remote setting helps create an instant sense of camaraderie between guests. Serene and peaceful, the retreat is built into a steep hillside split by a fast-flowing stream with a natural soundtrack of birdsong and rushing water. Architect Robert Powell took inspiration from Angkor Wat: he's incorporated the concept of great beauty emerging from a tangle of jungle into Kamalaya's tiled roof, open-side timber and stone buildings. You are surrounded by giant banana trees, casuarinas and bougainvillea so ferociously verdant it takes a moment to make out the structures hidden among them. The ancient Buddhist monks' cave at the heart of the nine-acre retreat is so overhung with plants you're likely to discover it only after walking past the entrance a dozen times (come after dark to be enchanted by the flickering candles on the flower-strewn altar). But the otherworldly vibe of the resort owes much to the husband-and-wife team: John, who lived as a yogi monk in a Himalayan community for more than 18 years, and Karina Stewart, a Chinese medicine practitioner. A Swiss managing director and French spa director keep things on an efficient footing, but the prevailing feeling is of the Stewarts' gentle compassion and generosity. Days start with breakfast in the shady restaurant overlooking treetops, where you can feast on muesli with flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds and goji berries, or freshly sliced mango, papaya and pineapple. Then it's off to yoga, t'ai chi, or to be minutely scrutinised and corrected in a one-on-one Pilates session in the state-of-the-art gym. Book a mentoring session for late afternoon; it's directional and completely worth it. Treatments don't involve anything that could leave you wondering why you bothered (no chocolate wraps) and can be delivered after dark; nothing is quite as exhilarating and soothing as being worked on to the sound of cicadas while a tropical storm thunders around you.

INSIDER TIP Don't overload your schedule: put off booking treatments until you're here – except for a massage on your arrival day – and ask for your initial consultation on the second day when you're back in your right frame of mind.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers a seven-night Relax & Renew programme from £2,249 per person full board, including flights, transfers, a wellness gift pack and all treatments as per the programme.

HEALING HOLIDAYS EXCLUSIVE Book a seven-night programme and receive a spa voucher worth £150, plus book a Sea View Suite for a complimentary upgrade and early check-in/late check-out.