



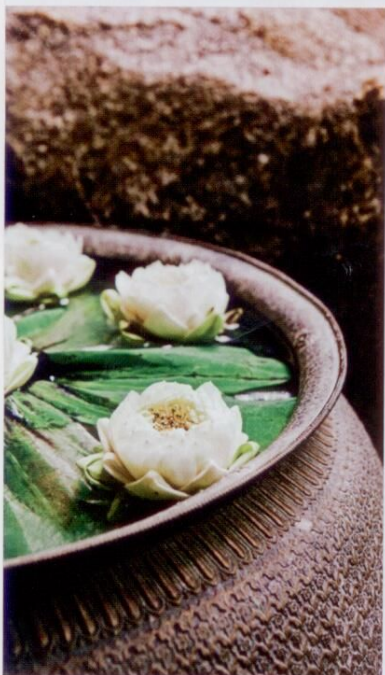
KAMALAYA

WEIGHT
LOSS

KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

BAREFOOT DESTINATION SPA FOR AN EMOTIONAL M.O.T.

Mass tourism has taken some of the gloss off this Thai island but, thankfully, the jungle-clad hillside that's home to Kamalaya still feels deliciously remote and can seduce even the most over-wrought into a state of healing self-reflection. In fact, the tiny cave around which the resort has been sensitively built has been a place of pilgrimage since a Buddhist monk first retreated here three centuries ago to study the art of meditation. But it had been abandoned by the time John Stewart, a Canadian runaway-turned-monk-turned-art dealer, stumbled across the spot, instantly recognised its magical qualities and made it the centrepiece of his holistic wellness sanctuary. Thirteen years on, the cave remains the inimitable factor that makes the Kamalaya experience so special. Local villagers and monks still pray here and their delight in sharing this sacred, candle-lit grotto with guests is both humbling and inspiring. It typifies the deceptively simple approach of Stewart and his charismatic wife, Karina, a Master in Traditional Chinese Medicine: encouraging small, sustainable changes on a physical, emotional and mental level. A string of international awards not only rubber-stamps the effectiveness of their philosophy, it means they attract the world's best permanent therapists and visiting practitioners with annual residences by names such as Simon Low, who co-founded Triyoga, one of the UK's leading studios, and Dr Song Qinggeng, a specialist in acupuncture-based facial rejuvenation. Try it: the results are so much better than Botox. There is also a carefully



A STRING OF INTERNATIONAL AWARDS MEANS THIS ATTRACTS THE WORLD'S BEST PERMANENT THERAPISTS AND VISITING PRACTITIONERS

curated but extensive spa menu and skilled naturopaths to customise the ideal programme for each guest. Increasingly, that means addressing modern-day problems such as stress, burn out, cancer and divorce. The food has been another key factor in its success. As with everything here, it is intelligently constructed so that those on detox programmes are not subjected to fierce fasting for phantom 'water' weight loss. Instead, the chefs fuse Asian healing traditions with the latest scientific studies to create dishes that reduce inflammation and boost metabolism, which leads to effective fat reduction. Meat as well as seafood and vegetarian dishes are served and guests can even drink coffee, beer and wine – organic, of course. Perhaps the accommodation isn't quite so impressive. Choose between the original hillside villas, surrounded by swishing banana palms but with bathrooms that could do with a spruce, or the more contemporary superior suites up in the treetops. These were added in 2015 along with a stunning outdoor pool, a state-of-the-art gym and a huge yoga sala, all looking out over the jade-green Gulf of Thailand. And despite the island's development, on Kamalaya's cute beach all you see are restful views of misty islands and perhaps a local out for a walk with their pet elephant (really). Three hundred years on, this place is still hitting the mark.

INSIDER TIP Check before swimming too far off the beach, the bay can have strong currents.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers a seven-night Relax & Renew programme from £2,850 per person full board, including flights, transfers and all treatments according to the programme.

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