



## ABSOLUTE SANCTUARY

WEIGHT  
LOSS

KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

INCREDIBLE-VALUE ALL-ROUNDER WITH BRILLIANT CLASSES

What an absolute bargain. Sure, there's the lurid Moroccan-themed interior design, the odd cracked tile and cluttered treatment room. But it's hard to think of another tropical spa – even in Thailand, where reasonable rates are more often than not the rule – that offers quite so much for comparatively so little. In a spruced-up hotel on a steep hillside inland, about 10 minutes from the coast, Absolute Sanctuary has now honed its delivery of a comprehensive but easy-going programme of fitness, cleansing, detox, weight-loss and stress-reduction regimens to such an extent that more likely than not the person in tree pose next to you will be a fan on a repeat visit. Here's the opportunity to join outstandingly good and varied daily reformer Pilates and yoga (from hatha to hot via meditational and ashtanga), eat delicious and nutritious low-calorie vegetarian meals, enjoy all the usual spa treatments and perhaps be inspired to enrol in the 30-day Lifestyle Change programme (that month-long total overhaul costs about £7,000, flights included). The secret is that it also operates as a training

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centre for yoga teachers, which explains the exceptionally high standard of classes. That you can undergo a complete fast, existing on coconut water and having colonics, is another draw for some. Then there's the more general appeal of a nutritionist, down-to-earth and encouraging, plus the workforce of powerhouse therapists whose diminutive size belies the vigour with which they can work their fingers, elbows and feet deep into your muscles. Your body will never have had so much attention. Get through the rigorous and relentless exercise during the day – there is no more reliable way to come home feeling honed and toned – and then it's a special pleasure to stretch out after dark for a semi-open-air massage while listening to the sound of cicadas and savouring the fragrant scents wafting over from the Love Kitchen. Everyday pleasures on a South-east Asian island go without saying: the limpid warmth you wake up to each day, the hours and hours of mind-rinsing sunshine, the balmy nights. Being inland is perhaps a bit of a drawback, but morning hikes to the beach and an afternoon shuttle bus there compensate. The decor veers between oranges, pinks and purples in the 38 rooms and new suites, clean lines and modernity in the large yoga hall, and unreconstructed Nineties style in some of the small treatment rooms, but the unpretentiousness adds to the relaxed vibe. You need have no fear of coming here alone, keeping to yourself, just sleeping and reading, or chatting around the pool. Evenings are quiet, unless you want to join the inevitable group going into town. With sometimes patchy Wi-Fi it's sensible to bring plenty to read. But in all key points, it delivers. The yoga and Pilates classes are held in large breezy rooms with tutors who diligently and kindly correct poses. Fresh juices and smoothies, included in the rates, are whizzed up to order at the pool bar, and from the coconut yogurt and fresh mango at breakfast onwards the Love Kitchen menu is varied enough to remain moreish all week. It all seems such good value you wonder where the catch is. There isn't one.

**INSIDER TIP** As soon as you arrive, get the schedule for the beach shuttle, switch any afternoon treatments to early evening, and enjoy the lovely bonus of a few hours by the sea before your Thai massage or colonic.

**BOOK IT** Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; [healingholidays.co.uk/condenast](http://healingholidays.co.uk/condenast)) offers a seven-night yoga programme from £1,999 per person, full board, including flights and transfers.

**HEALING HOLIDAYS EXCLUSIVE** Book a seven-night wellness package and get two extra nights free, including breakfast and a complimentary room upgrade.

