



KAMALAYA

WEIGHT
LOSS

KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

A MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH FOR PERFECT ALIGNMENT

The third gleaming wellness musketeer on the island of Koh Samui also happens to be the trailblazer. When Kamalaya opened in 2005, it cleverly embodied the spirituality of an Indian ashram wrapped in the comfortable trappings of a tropical sanctuary. It was a niche but successful formula that was all down to John and Karina Stewart. Canadian John is, in his own words, a 'traveller and seeker' who spent 16 years as a monk in the Himalayas, and his charismatic wife is an alumna of Princeton and Master of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Their joint vision, combining his deep knowledge of meditation with hers of alternative health and yoga, resulted in Kamalaya. Fittingly, a mystical shrine used for centuries as a retreat by Buddhist monks forms the beating heart of the place, which now spreads around it, extending steeply downhill to a small sliver of beach. Villas are dotted among casuarinas and frangipani, with banana trees and boulders integrated into the architecture (the work of artist Robert Powell); the airy treatments rooms, two restaurants, swimming pools and yoga and Pilates shalas are hardly visible. The somewhat bland bedrooms and suites feel older than their years decoratively but are immaculately kept. Pick one by the beachfront and you can potter straight into the sea; this is offset by a thigh-burning walk uphill to the main hotel, though, and upper rooms have wonderful views across the bay. Chef Kai Mueller's food is healing and utterly delicious, and the animated communal table speaks volumes about the harmonious atmosphere (almost half the guests are solo). Days are focused and leave no time for consideration of how you look, trotting oily-haired from Ayurvedic head rub to Reiki session. The treatment menu

THE BEATING HEART OF THE PLACE IS A MYSTICAL SHRINE USED FOR CENTURIES AS A RETREAT BY BUDDHIST MONKS

runs the gamut from basic detoxes to emotional balancing, stress and burnout, yoga and optimal fitness. The latter is particularly well rounded, incorporating exercise (personal training, super-stretching, yoga and Pilates) alongside infrared-sauna sessions, physiotherapy and massages, and meditation and nutritional guidance. And that's before you've signed up to group classes. There's little downtime for the Stewarts as they keep things pushing forward. Their new Structural Revival programme is dedicated to recalibrating and correcting posture. Throw in intensive physiotherapy and

myofascial-release therapy, and a week of this sends you back out into the world totally realigned. The group retreats and the Embracing Change programme do the same for the mind, involving Life Enhancement Mentors,

all with monastic backgrounds and capable of creating profound shifts in emotional balance. Treatments mix Eastern and Western therapies, and visiting practitioners, such as Dr Song Qinggeng for TCM and acupuncture-based facial rejuvenation, continue to be sought after. Unsurprisingly, repeat bookings remain impressive, and Kamalaya's reputation as one of the world's top destination spas, with value-added soul, is undimmed.

INSIDER TIP If you can't get to Thailand, book a pop-up Kamalaya retreat at Lime Wood Hotel in the New Forest from 3-5 or 5-7 June 2019.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers a seven-night programme from £2,975 per person, full board, including flights and transfers.

HEALING HOLIDAYS EXCLUSIVE Book a seven-night programme and get a £150 spa voucher.