



KAMALAYA

KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

WEIGHT
LOSS

ALL-IN-ONE LOCATION WITH THE WORLD'S TOP SPECIALISTS

Ganesha – the jolly elephant-headed god of new beginnings – greets guests. By the lotus pond in the lobby, they sip cups of blue butterfly pea tea beneath the serene gaze of a reclining Buddha. Even for those who have just stumbled in from a lengthy journey, it's impossible to resist being enveloped by a nurturing sense of calm. Kamalaya, which turns 15 this year, is the brainchild of a former monk and dealer in Asian art, who was inspired by the discovery of a hermit's cave in these wooded grounds. It forms the heart of the retreat, in which bedrooms and villas are tucked amid granite boulders, lush vegetation, ponds and waterfalls that tumble from the top of a hill down to the Gulf of Thailand. One can only wonder at the logistics of building here, on steep land where more than 40 species of medicinal plants grow wild. A 90-minute walk with a herbalist brings a new respect for the benefits of mulberry, tulsi, the moringa tree and other exotic flora. The setting of the wellness centre is glorious. Sure, there are saunas, steam rooms (a rather splendid one in a cave), gym, Pilates studio, yoga pavilions surrounded by

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fluttering prayer flags and instructors to bring visitors to the peak of fitness. But Kamalaya triumphs for the range of its programmes, which expertly combine Ayurvedic, Chinese, Japanese and Thai therapies, along with more prosaic Western diagnostics, to ensure the optimal outcome. In the week-long Balance and Revitalise itinerary there's a blend of soothing *shirodhara* and reiki, along with the more vigorous *chi nei tsang*, the hugely beneficial Taoist deep abdominal massage that unblocks qi and leaves you walking on air. Among the more sought-after offerings is Personal Mentoring, from which even the most sceptical derive benefit. These highly bespoke sessions are led by therapists trained in both clinical psychology and more spiritually focused Indian tradition. Gentle probing seeks to unlock the source of behavioural patterns and resolve inner conflict. Along with group sessions of t'ai chi, yoga and mindfulness and a stream of visiting specialists – from cranio-sacral practitioners to sound healers – the diet of self-improvement is never-ending. Speaking of diet, the choice of superfood-laden dishes is worth the trip alone. Inventive banana flower salads are an explosion of unfamiliar flavours, while sweet potato *yaki*, with dates, nori, ginger and sesame, is deliciously rich. Rooms are elegant and unfussy: all natural materials, stone and teak, with ocean views and perfumed forest as balm. Soulful yet earthy, professional yet relaxed, this is a destination spa with a gorgeous hotel attached.

INSIDER TIP Tempting though it may be, don't overload the day with too many treatments – leave time to idle on Kamalaya's private beach.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.com/condenast) offers a seven-night Relax and Renew programme from £3,399 per person, full board, including flights and transfers. Healing Holidays exclusive: book a seven-night programme and receive a £150 spa voucher.



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