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Cleansing bliss

Forget juice cleanses and vinegar shots – **Marisa Howden** discovers a far more delightful way to detox



LET'S BE HONEST HERE – detoxing isn't easy and it's not supposed to be. If it was then we'd all be Gwyneth Paltrow lookalikes, preaching how we love cabbage water and conscious uncoupling. In reality, detox isn't what most people think it is – living on a concoction of lemon, maple syrup and cayenne pepper, telling people we're stomaching this poisonous brew in order to flush out the toxins when we're really doing it in the hope of losing a few kilos.

Detox is actually about nourishing your body with nutritious foods while striving to re-establish inner balance. It took me a week at a five star sanctuary – equipped with private naturopaths, specialty menus and twice-daily yoga sessions – to figure that out.

It's here – on my journey with the award-winning Kamalaya Wellness Sanctuary and Holistic Spa on the southern coastline of Thailand's exquisite Koh Samui Island where my love for detox all began.

"Yoga is not a pose. It is balance and steadiness; not of the body but of the mind." **Mallika Savalkar** | powerofnowoasis.com



Detox is about nourishing your body with nutritious foods while striving to re-establish inner balance

"I'm grateful that I can enjoy mindfulness while working with a range of amazing people." **Caitlin Reid** | healthandthecity.com.au



Guests are encouraged to eat nutrient-rich, low-inflammatory foods, and daily yoga classes are available, as well as private one-on-one sessions



Discovery

Having arrived after a 14-hour journey from Sydney, I'm in desperate need of a hot shower and cold drink. The humidity in Koh Samui, like at any Southeast Asian destination, takes a little time to adjust to, so the potent (yet refreshing) ginger elixir I receive when I arrive at Kamalaya is most welcome.

After quickly settling into my plush beachside villa – fitted with its own private plunge pool, outdoor shower, expansive lounge room and sun deck – exhaustion starts to rear its ugly head. So I dive into the very comfortable bed without any hesitation, not even bothering to consider tailormaking my sleeping arrangement from the pillow menu.

The next morning I hit the ground running. Literally. Trying to make the most out of this detox, I begin day one with a light run on the beach and through Kamalaya's elaborate grounds. Who needs coffee when you have endorphins to wake you?

Located on a hillside on the Southern tip of Koh Samui, Kamalaya is as unique in its approach to detox, as it is in terms of location. Centred around a century-old cave that Buddhist monks once used as a place of

meditation and retreat, Kamalaya's essence is expressed in its name, "lotus (*kamal*) realm (*alaya*)", an ancient symbol for the growth and unfolding of the human spirit.

It's founders, John and Karina Stewart, say Kamalaya is an expression of their life experiences – inspired by the 16 years John spent devoted to spiritual studies in a Himalayan community and Karina's 22 years in the study and practice of diverse Asian healing, including her background as a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine.

In 2005, John and Karina's vision to serve and inspire others officially became a reality when Kamalaya opened its doors. Since then the resort has touched thousands of souls and as I look around and discover my surrounds, Kamalaya's holistic approach to physical and emotional well-being begins to touch mine.

Philosophy

Feeling famished after my run, I head over to Kamalaya's main restaurant where breakfast and dinner is served daily. The spread is impressive, with a selection of fresh fruit, specialty breads, homemade spreads, buckwheat pancakes and eggs cooked to order. The menu is created with

healthy eating in mind, with a separate detox-specific selection available. Kamalaya encourages you to eat as much as you want while detoxing (I was never too hungry) but suggest limiting yourself to low-inflammatory and nutrient-rich foods that help to minimise toxic intake and reduce the load on the digestive system.

That means I've said goodbye to meat, alcohol, coffee, sugar, bread, rice and most other grains. Since my meal options are limited I opt to have my first (of many) wheatgrass and Gotu Kola shots instead. They're included with breakfast every morning to help provide key nutrients and assist the detox process. To say the flavour is strong is an understatement – it's like a lifetime supply of vegetables condensed into a 60ml shot. I feel detoxed just looking at it.

I manage to stomach the drinks, as well as a small selection of detox-approved items from the buffet and make my way to the wellness sanctuary for my introductory detox consultation. After a series of tests, including a bio-impedance analysis to measure my fat percentages, cellular vitality and water and nutrient retention levels, I meet with Australian-born naturopath Laurel to learn more about Kamalaya's approach to detox.

Laurel explains that we're exposed to harmful toxins from our everyday environment that can result in long-term health issues. Kamalaya's approach to detox is designed to support and enhance the body's ability to eliminate these toxins, using a synergy of Eastern and Western philosophies to address physical and emotional needs. They focus on pairing elimination with nourishment to provide a gentle approach rather than a punishing regimen.

I'm advised that even though I follow a somewhat healthy lifestyle, and while most of my test results have come back really positive, detox should still be undertaken at least once a year in order to increase energy and



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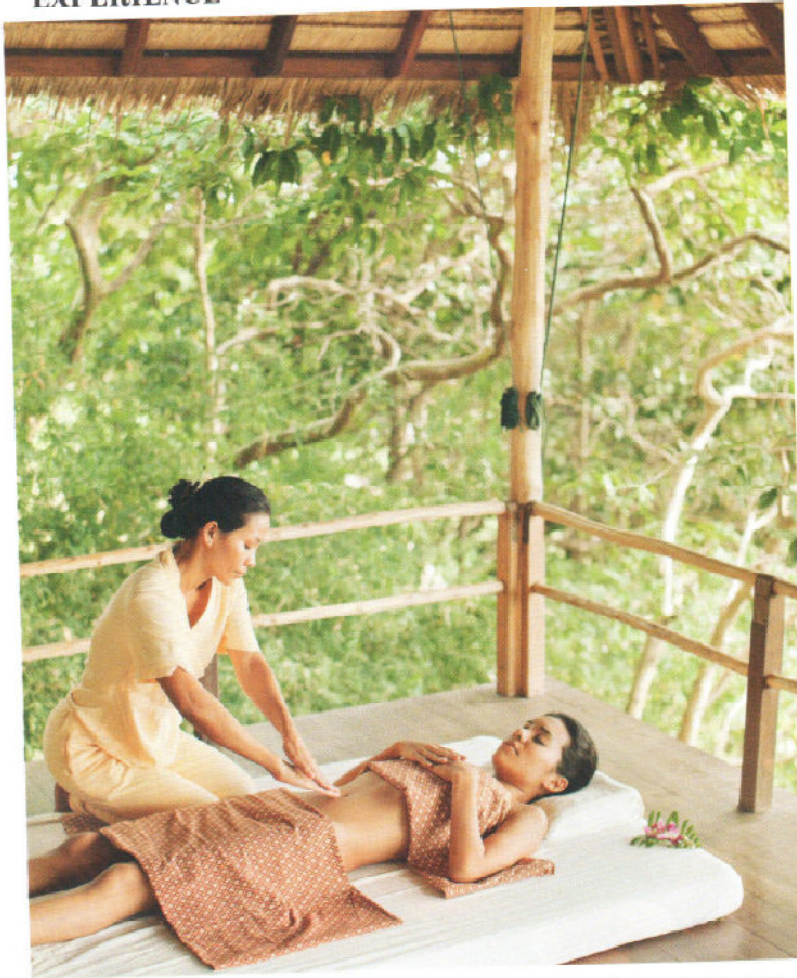
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Based on the Taoist theory that refers to the gut as the second brain, Chi Nei Tseng is a series of firm massage strokes to the abdominal area

vitality, as well as to create a foundation for optimum health, longevity and personal growth.

With that, Laurel hands me my schedule of treatments for the week and sends me on my way. Inspired to get the most out of Kamalaya's incredible healing powers, I'm starting to feel a little more at ease and ready to kick this detox in the butt. Especially since my first of many treatments is up-

Euphoric bliss

If you've never had a Thai massage before then I'm telling you right now to get one. It is the most dynamic treatment you'll ever experience. It's certainly not what

I expect from a massage – I can only describe it as being bent into contorted shapes like a pretzel. But it's these pretzel-like shapes that melt my tension away, leaving me feeling revitalised and restored.

An excellent introduction to the more than 12 treatments that have been specifically selected to help enhance my detox program, Kamalaya's Traditional Thai massage is just the beginning of a week of euphoric bliss.

Throughout my five-day stay I'm treated to aromatherapy massages, detoxifying scrubs, invigorating body wraps and traditional Asian foot and hand massages.

Almost as distinctive as the

Thai massage are two other treatments I've never experienced before – Chi Nei Tseng and lymphatic drainage. Unique to Thailand and based on the Taoist theory that refers to the gut as the second brain, Chi Nei Tseng is a series of firm massage strokes to the abdominal area. Kamalaya find it essential to the detox process as it's thought to help balance the digestive and nervous system by releasing emotional blocks and psychological tension that may have been acquired over the course of our lives. During one of my three Chi Nei Tseng sessions, I feel intense pressure and even pain in some areas. At times I feel overwhelmed with emotion, which I'm told is all part of the release process.

Quite the opposite to Chi Nei Tseng is lymphatic drainage therapy – a detoxifying massage that uses the softest of strokes to encourage the movement of lymphatic fluid, which therefore eliminates waste. For someone who's used to deep tissue massages, I can't quite get into this treatment but appreciate its relaxing tendencies nonetheless.

Healing energy

Perched amongst lush tropical gardens atop a steep hillside with stunning views of the surrounding pale blue coastline sits the ideal space to connect with oneself – Kamalaya's yoga pavilion.

Kamalaya offers up to two yoga sessions a day as part of every wellness program, including private sessions for those who need a more personalised touch, as well as intensive stretching, Pilates, pranayama, Tai Chi and meditation classes and resident instructors and visiting practitioners who specialise in Hatha, Vinyasa and Yin styles.

For me it's the option to move between a gentle Hatha to a more energetic flow that seems to work hand-in-hand with my detox, healing my body and restoring my soul. The Yin yoga soothes

my tired muscles while teaching me to be patient and quiet my busy mind.

On the days when the detox is taking its toll, the Vinyasa injects an energy that awakens me, bringing me back to life even when I'm feeling most depleted. It's this energy that seems to drive Kamalaya's healing abilities, creating ideal surrounds for holistic practices such as yoga and meditation.

The chakra meditation on my last day is most enlightening, as Kamalaya's spiritual advisor Rajesh helps me to restore a connection with my own seven pillars of energy. Starting with my root chakra at the base of my spine, I move through my body and my sacral, solar plexus, heart and throat chakras, releasing feelings of inadequacy and self-worth until I reach the third eye and finally my crown chakra, where I begin to connect with myself spiritually. The meditation is powerful, allowing me to reflect on my life and the many fortunes I've been bestowed with.

Realisation

Buddhist monks have long favoured Koh Samui as a sanctuary for spiritual retreat.

They believe the island has a special energy that enriches and enlightens their spiritual path and helps them connect more profoundly with the universal energies. It's the energy that radiates off Kamalaya that I find most illuminating. It fills your every breath with light and love. It's an awakening of senses that has allowed me to stop and savour each moment, opening my eyes to every detail, every sound and every taste.

Kamalaya has reinstilled in me a deep sense of gratitude for all the beauty that exists in this world and – as tough as it may seem to give up everyday pleasures such as coffee and sugar – the rewards you receive in restoring your body and balancing your mind far outweigh any struggles.

And so, after a week of wheatgrass shots, stomach massages, spiritual connections and emotional releases, I come to realise that detoxing isn't so bad. It's even better when you can do it in the confines of a five star sanctuary on the coastline of a beautiful island. In fact – I'd be quite happy to detox like that any day. ☺

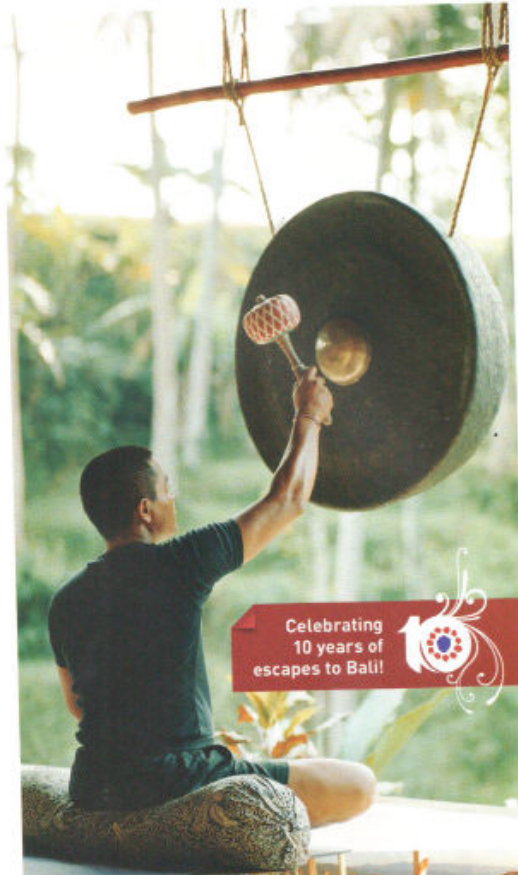


Fact file

Kamalaya is a multi-award winning Wellness Sanctuary and Holistic Spa located on the tropical beachfront southern coastline of Koh Samui, Thailand. The resort offers a holistic wellness experience that integrates healing therapies from East and West, a breathtakingly beautiful natural environment, inspired healthy cuisine, holistic fitness practices and customised wellness programs ranging from Detoxification to Stress & Burnout, as well as Optimal Fitness, Ideal Weight and Yoga Synergy. A seven-night Comprehensive Detox program starts from 109,850 THB per person, twin share (approx AUD \$3500). See kamalaya.com for more info.

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