

EXPLORE



BODY AS TEMPLE
Kamalaya on Koh Samui allows guests to tap into their spiritual side

THAILAND

THE MIND HOLIDAY

SOPHIE BERESINER HEADS TO KAMALAYA FOR AN EMOTIONAL OVERHAUL

After four unsuccessful rounds of IVF, I had one more chance before I had to give up completely. Physically I was doing all the right things: healthy eating, bathing in cider vinegar and Himalayan salt – really. But with every crushing negative result came a bigger issue: a growing distrust of my own body and an increasing sense of pessimism. What if it’s my fault? What if these feelings are bringing on negative outcomes?

I’m not good at meditating, as I have a very busy mind, and I’d previously discounted the idea of a holistic resort. Yet one phone call with Kamalaya’s naturopath changed my opinion. She recommended an ‘Embracing Change’ programme, with its focus on emotional wellbeing. I was assured I’d leave with restored emotional balance and tools to use at home. I signed up on the spot.

On the south coast of Koh Samui, wellness retreat Kamalaya is built around a cave in the jungle, once used by monks for meditating.

This encapsulates the essence of the place – it’s as soul-soothing as you could imagine.

The retreat focused on ‘community’, so we were encouraged to eat at a communal table, where the Thai menu offered choices for strict ‘detoxers’, as well as ridiculously delicious ‘still-healthy’ dishes for the rest of us.

I could feel the stress leaving my body as soon as I saw my villa, which had few frills but spectacular views of the jungle meeting the sea, a huge balcony with daybeds and an outdoor bathroom.

“Built around a CAVE IN THE JUNGLE, it’s about as SOUL-SOOTHING as you could imagine”

My road to emotional health started with Smitha, a life-enhancement mentor with the kind of unblinking eyes you imagine can see inside your soul. I was sceptical as to what could be done in four sessions, but a guided meditative ‘regression’ to my childhood was amazingly effective and I left with more self-understanding than I’d gained from years of cognitive behavioural therapy.

I was also given a session with a TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) practitioner, which helped cure a panic attack that had lingered for my first two days. The mildly uncomfortable cupping that followed was said to cleanse the liver, which, according to TCM, is where we hold a lot of emotional distress. Next up were a series of massages varying from the traditional to a Chi Nei Tsang ‘internal organ massage’, which left me feeling light and weirdly happy.

Between various stress-reduction workshops, gym sessions, a day trip snorkelling and drinking coconut milk straight from the shell, something shifted in my psyche. I hadn’t suffered anxiety since day three. I felt healthy, but not in an extreme-detox way – I had a warm tint to my skin and such clear insight into my character and emotional strength that I left feeling supremely positive and fulfilled.

My story doesn’t end in the way I had hoped. While the final round of IVF was successful, the pregnancy did not progress beyond six weeks. But the important part is how I coped with it. Sad and frustrated, of course, but with a resilience I didn’t know I was capable of. Kamalaya tweaked my attitude and will forever hold a special place in my heart. I hope to return with my children – by whatever means they come to me – in the future.

Wellbeing Escapes offers a seven-night ‘Embracing Change’ programme at Kamalaya Wellness Sanctuary (wellbeingescapes.com) from £3,255pp. British Airways (ba.com) has return flights from London to Koh Samui from around £700.



IN HARMONY
The treatment rooms and pool at Kamalaya

Photographs: Getty Images, Rex Features, 4Corners