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AUSTRALIA

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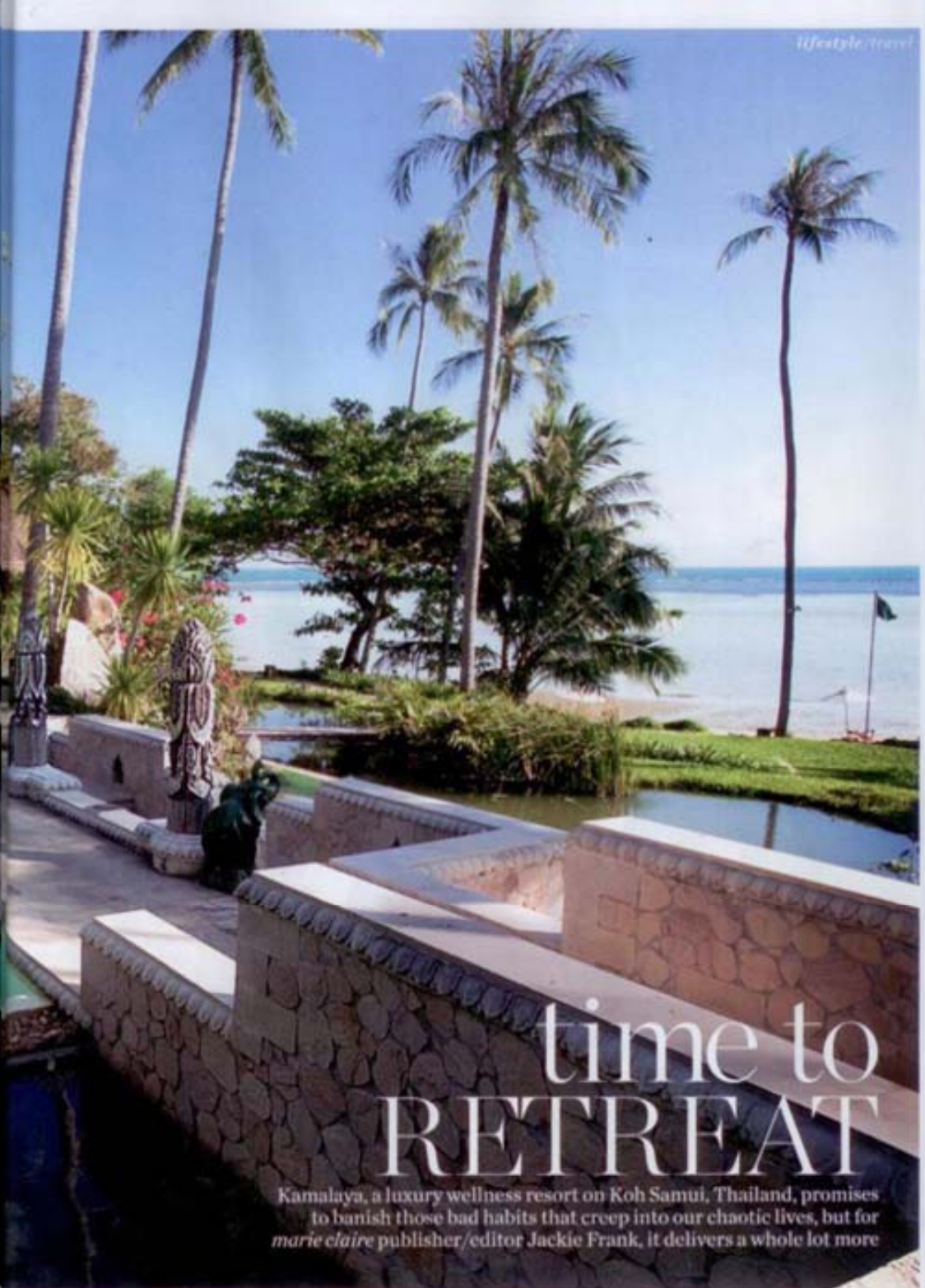
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+ editors' wish list



# time to RETREAT

Kamalaya, a luxury wellness resort on Koh Samui, Thailand, promises to banish those bad habits that creep into our chaotic lives, but for *marie claire* publisher/editor Jackie Frank, it delivers a whole lot more

Experience it all starting with Thailand's Kamalaya wellness sanctuary and holistic spa resort. [Visit us here](#).  
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Set in lush surrounds, Kamalaya offers visitors the chance to hit the pause button on life. Right: the resort is built into a lush hillside overlooking the beach on Koh Samui (below).

I've been fortunate enough to stay at a lot of wellness retreats and spas, and I never tire of being pampered and escaping the day-to-day grind. So with a week-long stay booked at Kamalaya, I had expected something similar – healthy food, great massages and total indulgence. I did not contemplate, however, that it would be life changing.

I arrived at the holistic retreat on the south coast of Thailand's Koh Samui at night, following weeks of travelling and a long-haul flight. I was tired, it was dark and almost too quiet, and I didn't feel that comfortable. As the courtesy buggy arrived outside my room, I recall whispering to myself, "What is this place?" But as soon as I stepped inside and felt the balmy air and saw an enormous boulder twinkling with tea lights, I knew the answer to my question: heaven.

As I made my way to breakfast the next morning I realised the resort is built into a lush hillside, with dramatic rocks and cascading streams and a divine beach below. Central to the design is a cave once used by Buddhist monks as a place of meditative retreat.

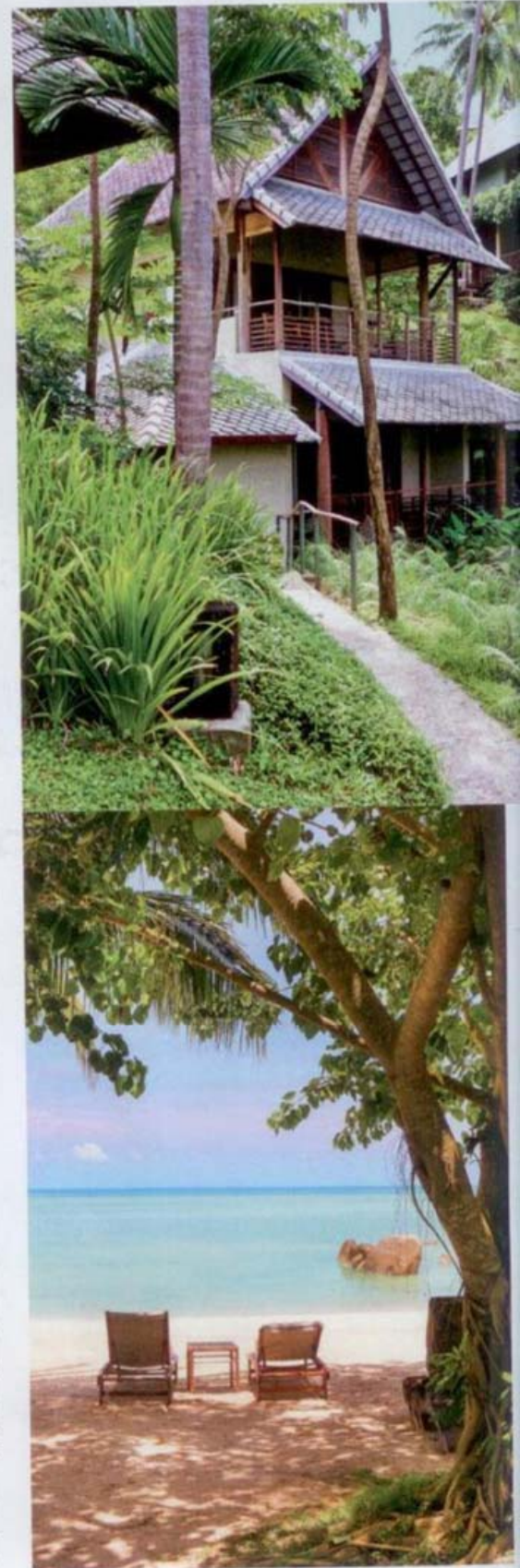
It was this natural spiritual centre that first drew the attention of Kamalaya's founders, John and Karina Stewart. The end result is a culmination

of their knowledge and experience – his as an ex-monk with 25 years spent in the Himalayas, and hers as a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine well practised in Asian healing. The couple has built, as John says, "a lifestyle that we want to live, that we actually live".

They also wanted to provide a wellness journey that allowed guests the time to pause. "As we connect with nature, we are brought back into our own senses of smell, of sight, of touch, of taste," explains Karina. "But it also brings us back into the present moment." Who knew I wasn't living in the present moment? Well, certainly not me! Call me a cynic, but until I came to Kamalaya, I would have called this kind of talk fanciful, or a good marketing pitch. But here, it was awakening.

Every guest at Kamalaya starts their stay with a wellness assessment, no matter which program you choose, or don't choose to do. As I wasn't sure what I needed and had only a short list of what I wanted (to lose a little weight), it was decided an à la carte option was best for me, which meant I could borrow a little from the detox programs (such as my menu), a little from the healthy lifestyle programs (like treatments), and then dip in and out of the activities that would best suit me.

In all, there are 11 programs (inclusive of accommodation, food and treatments) and more than 70 therapies ►





Many of the villas come with a private pool (also below). Below right: It would be hard not to relax in the panoramic view unfolding outside the windows of the open-air treatment room.



## 101 IDEAS

and treatments. Some guests stick strictly to one program, while others choose not to go by any set routine. The one thing shared by everyone is the amazing food. Here, the belief is that food should nourish, not restrict. Mostly vegetarian, low in salt, sugar and free from preservatives and allergens, the menu is satisfying and delicious. I never felt hungry, not for one second.

I had, on average, two treatments a day, including the far-infrared sauna - which did feel a bit like being in a microwave, but promised to burn kilojoules and detoxify - and the *chi nei tsang* (a deep abdominal massage),

which is used to enhance digestion and relieve stress. At first I was sceptical; it seemed crazy to get only your stomach tended to when you could have a whole body massage, but it was the most incredible thing I have ever experienced - I even managed to fall asleep. Twice.

For me, though, the biggest "aha!" moment came during a one-on-one session with Kamalaya's spiritual teacher, Rajesh Ramani, one of a number of people who give daily talks and workshops on anything from face reading to hypnotherapy. He uncovered my need for work/life balance and, most importantly, provided me with tools to take back to the real world. I have since unofficially claimed him as my own personal guru.

So, by the end of the week, I had lost weight, vowed to include as much of the menu into my daily life, and learnt to focus on one thing at a time. Instead of leaving with the belief that I had to remove one of the balls I juggle in order to be happy and stress-free, I floated out armed with real advice on how to cope with the life I have.

Oh, and a return booking. ■

**Staying there:** Package rates for a seven-night detox & rejuvenation program start from \$3600, and \$3700 for a seven-night Asian Bliss Program. Both include accommodation, all meals (from the detox and à la carte menu, respectively) and a range of consultations, supplements (on the detox program) and treatments.

**Food for thought:** The menu is designed for its healing properties and the ingredients change with the seasons - this isn't your average detox menu! Expect more food than you can possibly eat and recipes to inspire you once you go home, such as the banana flower salad (shown above).

**Getting there:** Singapore Airlines operates 121 flights per week to Singapore from most capital cities, with regional wing SilkAir operating daily flights to Koh Samui. For further information, visit [www.singaporeair.com](http://www.singaporeair.com).