

Thai tricks

Feeling frazzled? A hardcore holistic regime of intensive fasting and colonic irrigation in Thailand will get you back on the road to health, says recent convert David Green

It was the name of the retreat that hooked me first. With both ends of the candle long since burnt out by the misguided assumption that the work hard, play hard ethos was sustainable into my 40s, I didn't just need a break, I needed a complete overhaul.

But having booked New Body and Mind's 'Intensive Care' programme, I began to wonder what I had let myself in for. The closest I had come to holistic healing in the past was a couple of sweaty ashtanga sessions in an overheated basement in Wansdworth and a week off the booze, and here I was about to embark on a three week daily routine of strictly scheduled early morning runs, fasting, colonic irrigation, yoga, meditation and massage. Even the time off sounded like hard work.

My trepidation was allayed somewhat on arrival. Situated on the white sands of Lipa Noi beach on the relatively unspoilt west coast of Koh Samui, the layout and general ambience of the resort positively oozes wellbeing. Walking through an impressively stocked kitchen garden, the first sights to greet me were an open-air massage platform and yoga sala directly overlooking the palm-treed shoreline, both draped in orange fabric gently billowing in the tropical sea breeze.

I was welcomed by the founder of the resort, Nino Lambert, who further reassured me by explaining that the whole ethos of their seemingly draconian approach was rooted in a commitment to helping guests to make long-term lifestyle changes to promote on-going physical and spiritual wellbeing, rather than



simply providing a brief respite from the daily grind of the modern world.

After an impressively exhaustive medical and lifestyle assessment with the nursing team, I was shown to my beachfront hut – basic, but perfectly comfortable, with no TV or radio to distract from the healing process – and instructed in the delights of self-administered colonics (thankfully with the assistance of a medical dummy) by unfailingly helpful and smiling Simon, the Thai general manager of the resort.

Each day that followed precisely the same format, initiated with a 6.30 alarm call and 5k walk round the nearby lake to open the pores and stimulate the metabolism, with the subsequent various treatments and activities scheduled at hourly intervals and culminating in a herbal steam bath at six in the evening. But what started off feeling like a quite punishing regime very quickly transformed into a daily rhythm that itself felt restorative.

Having being come accustomed to such a frenetic lifestyle at home, the meditation classes were a revelation. At first feeling extremely self-conscious and unable to ‘let go’, through the practice of simple breathing and visualisation techniques, very soon I was able to access deep states of relaxation and calm that were, for me, unprecedented and which set the perfect tone for the hatha yoga that followed.

As a complete novice, I felt I was being challenged but not over-stretched by the instructor so as the days progressed both my confidence and general sense of well-being improved dramatically. By the time I had been treated to an hour of shiatsu massage, listening to the waves lap the shore, I was invariably in a state of unmitigated bliss.



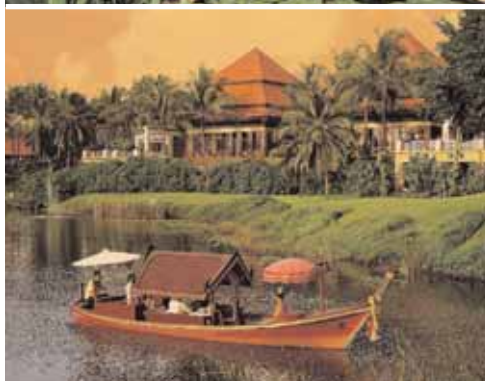
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Perhaps most startling of all was the fast. After three days of cleansing and surprisingly tasty herbal broths, my daily nutrition for seven days consisted of carrot juice with ginger and garlic and a glass of spirulina with water in the morning, a glass of tamarind juice in the evening, with colon-cleansing psyllium husk shakes and kidney-flushing herbal tea throughout the day. But apart from a brief lull on the second day, when everything felt like monumental effort, my energy levels seemed to explode; the morning run felt like a walk in the park and in addition to the scheduled activities I found my self enthusiastically throwing myself in a range of 'unscheduled' activities from beach volleyball to Thai boxing.

The phrase 'food never tasted so good' doesn't begin to do justice to the experience of eating after a fast. Gently reintroduced to solids with a plate of papaya for my first breakfast, I was soon fully enjoying the delights of Thai cuisine as I started to replace some of the 11 kilos that had seemed to drop away without my really even noticing.

My remaining days were filled with the by now satisfying rhythm of activities and augmented with various nutritional workshops and the development of a simple dietary, lifestyle and exercise plan to help combat the more toxic elements of 21st century living. Clearly, the rest was largely down to me, but I felt as if for the first time I clearly understood the enormous potential benefits to a more holistic approach to living.

Costs £3,290 for the 22 night intensive care programme which includes all treatments and therapies. One week courses cost from £795. For details call 00 66 77 423.189 or go to newbodyandmind.com



The luxury alternative...

Can't face a hardcore detox – try the pampering option instead

If you want the ultimate in luxury – and have some serious cash to burn – Banyan Tree Phuket ticks all the boxes. The décor is elegant and stylish (from the reception area to the insanely indulgent double pool villas, ideal for honeymooners), the service exceptional and the cuisine so divine you'll want to take the chef back home with you. But it's the spa facilities that are the golden cherry on this already decadent cake. Boasting its own Spa Academy to train its therapists, Banyan Tree Phuket uses ancient traditional techniques in its health and beauty treatments – and the indulgent theme doesn't stop there. There are 12 spa pavilions (recreations of royal Thai salas adorned with intricate stone sculptures) and six of those each comes complete with an outdoor bath. The outdoor treatment 'room' is particularly exquisite, where you can enjoy the views of the surrounding spa area as if you're outside, without the worry of someone peering in. If you can handle the heat, it's definitely worthwhile booking it for your treatment.

My 90-minute massage (starting with a foot bath), using a combination of firm hand strokes and wonderfully scented healing herbal compresses left my tired muscles soothed and relaxed, and my mind totally at peace. I was also treated to a head massage that sent me off to sleep just as the tinkle of a tiny bell rang to signify the end of my treatment. And the massage wasn't just physical – there was a strong spiritual element to it in the type of strokes used to awaken the senses and the traditional ritual of the foot bath at the start. I felt like I was floating as I left for my room, and if my stay hadn't been so short, I would have booked myself in for another delicious treatment!

With its peaceful surroundings and extensive spa therapies, Banyan Tree Phuket is perfect for those happy to splash out and be well and truly pampered. You might have to re-mortgage your home to do it though, but it's worth it.

The Spa Indulgence package at Banyan Tree, Phuket, costs from £343 per night (minimum 2-night stay) and includes breakfast, a 90-minute massage, a massage lesson, 20% discount on subsequent massages, a gift, a welcome drink and return transfers from the hotel to the airport. Offer valid until January 10th 2008.. For details call 00 66 76 324 274 or go to banyantree.com