



SAMAHITA RETREAT

KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

EXPERT-LEVEL YOGA AND STRESS-ANNIHILATING BREATHWORK IN A SERENE BEACH SETTING

Paul Dallaghan is the yogis' yogi, an internationally renowned teacher who's more interested in scientific research than celebrity endorsement, so while other instructors busy themselves doing DVDs, he's working on a PhD about the benefits of the ancient discipline. That pioneering work keeps him at the USA's prestigious Emory University, Atlanta, for much of the year, but his heart belongs to his lovely low-key retreat on Koh Samui's sleepy southern tip. It's easy to see why. Samahita represents the Thailand of 20 years ago: slow-paced, charming, sitting right on a skinny strip of biscuity beach, with long-tail fishing boats bobbing in the jade-coloured water, village kids swinging off the trunks of coconut palms and one of the island's most revered landmarks, the Laem Sor Pagoda, bookending its western edge. If ever a location could coax you into the full lotus pose, it's this one. And what Samahita offers is a yoga holiday with serious street cred. The retreat is essentially a world-famous yoga-teacher-training centre but as its reputation for excellence grew, so did the pleas to let in 'civilians'. Finally, three years ago, Dallaghan did just that, launching YogaCoreCycle, a cleverly constructed programme that works as well for absolute beginners as the more experienced. It's not all sun salutations, either. The schedule embraces spinning classes and high-intensity core workouts to get your diaphragm engaged for the five hours of daily exercise devoted to a mix of challenging dynamic vinyasa, relaxing restorative yoga, meditation and breathwork. The latter is

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Dallaghan's passion, so expect useful advice on take-home breathing techniques to combat stress. And while the school element may be hardcore, the instructors are fun and down to earth; there's even a sort of meditation speed-dating system where guests can try quick hits of styles from om-chanting to candle-gazing to see what resonates best with them. The design is intentionally simple. Bedrooms are pared back: no phone, TV or minibar. Public areas are open air and open plan, and guests tend to drift to the split-level living space and communal-dining area, the juice bar or the swimming pool after classes in a beachfront shala. There is zero dressing up. And while alcohol and smoking are banned, it's definitely not a po-faced

bootcamp. There's decent Wi-Fi and someone is always on their phone, but that's balanced by a delightfully hippie vibe – you're asked to observe silence until 10am and clear your own plates after meals. The food is buffet

style with wholesome fish and vegetarian dishes, and a detox corner of bone broths, salads and raw dips; dessert might be a raw chocolate ball. It's all very persuasive, so be careful – there's a distinct possibility you'll start eyeing up forthcoming course dates and dream of retraining as a yoga teacher.

INSIDER TIP Watch out for territorial dogs along the beach – they can give you a fright when they leap out of the undergrowth barking.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers a seven-night YogaCoreCycle programme from £1,475 per person, full board, including flights and transfers.