

## ABSOLUTE SANCTUARY

KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

HARDCORE FITNESS WITH A BLAST OF SUNSHINE

WEIGHT  
LOSS

Thailand is known as the land of smiles and it is – unless you go within 10 feet of a muay Thai ring. Then it's like being catapulted into a real-life version of *Kill Bill*. Kickboxing is thrilling, addictive and fabulously fat-burning. The ancient martial art is also more than just another workout craze. It requires high-octane coordination and razor-sharp mental agility, and even offers spiritual insights as it is layered with rituals such as the ceremonial blessing of the *mongkon* (headband). Not that you'll be thinking about cultural immersion as you gulp for air after mastering how to knee your opponent in the ribs or land an uppercut on their jaw. Muay Thai is popping up on spa schedules worldwide but Absolute Sanctuary is the place to learn authentic techniques. This boutique hotel is the southern outpost of Absolute You, Bangkok's largest health and fitness brand, which made its name by bringing cutting-edge but affordable workouts to the capital's bright young things. It has transported that formula to Koh Samui where, as well as the best trainers at bargain prices, guests get a golden beach thrown in for that all-important rest and recovery. The scenery may be 100-per-cent South-east Asian, the rest is anything but. And while the Moroccan-themed interior design jars initially, the vibrant pinks, golds and tangerines reflect Absolute's upbeat vibe and the look keeps the 38 spacious rooms cosy (although the bathrooms are rather basic). As well as kickboxing, there is a comprehensive list of activities to choose from, including five hours of complimentary yoga daily, in glass-walled studios overlooking the jungle, and two and a half hours of Pilates using reformer machines that crank up the intensity way beyond mat practice. There are also beach walks and aqua-power sessions in the infinity pool, although most people prefer to take a sunbed beside it, with a superfood smoothie and a view of the sparkling Gulf of Thailand across a palm-studded hillside. It's not all bootcamp briskness. There's excellent pampering with sweet local therapists. On arrival, a naturopath interprets guests' bio-impedance readings (including weight, fat mass and basal metabolism measurements) and suggests appropriate treatments and dietary choices. Do book a sunset Thai massage on the terrace, for which the

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cicadas provide a soothing soundtrack, followed by a delicious dinner at the Love Kitchen restaurant. The chef has fully committed to clean-eating, protein-packed dishes, including seafood curries, steaming noodles, creamy pastas and guilt-free puddings. Even if you're detoxing, meals are reasonably filling and imaginatively presented. Exercise, healthy food and smiles: this is easily the best way to kick-start a healthier lifestyle.

**INSIDER TIP** There is Wi-Fi but the signal is temperamental – worth bearing in mind if it's important you stay connected.

**BOOK IT** Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; [healingholidays.co.uk/condenast](http://healingholidays.co.uk/condenast)) offers a seven-night Yoga Holidays programme from £1,899 per person, full board, including flights, transfers and all treatments according to the programme.

**HEALING HOLIDAYS EXCLUSIVE** Book a seven- or eight-night package and get two extra nights free, including breakfast, a complimentary room upgrade, one Pilates group reformer class and a 60-minute Thai massage.

