

The new Enriched Gut programme at Kamalaya can set you on a path to a happy tummy and therefore a happy mind, finds Lucy Cleland.

## Kamalaya Enriched Gut Programme

The story of Kamalaya's origins is as romantic as the lemongrass and citrus-filled warm air that envelops you as you step into this jungle paradise on the southern coast of Koh Samui.

When John Stewart was 17, intrigued by eastern religion and philosophy, he set out from his native Canada to find a spiritual healer in the Himalayan regions of India about whom he had read and become fascinated by. It took seven years to accomplish but once John found him, he began helping him to create an ashram and thus learned the practices of being a monk.

During this time, a young, Princeton-educated Mexican woman arrived to undertake a three-month retreat. John knew this was the woman he was going to marry and he said so to his guru. 'Yes, you will,' replied the healer, 'but just not yet.' In fact, it took 11 years – years filled with letter writing between India and the US. But finally, when John had fulfilled his duties and was sent out into the world with his learnings, he headed to the USA to find Karina. They were married within a year.

They made their home in Katmandu, Nepal – Karina continuing her practice as a Traditional Chinese Medicine doctor and John as an art dealer (this he had done at the ashram to raise funds).

When John became seriously ill and was given just months to live, Karina healed him with TCM and Ayurveda. One of the herbs she had used was scarce in Nepal but grew in abundance in Thailand, so John decided to go there to complete his recovery. He was staying on Samui above where the current incarnation of Kamalaya sits, and he asked his host whether there was a way to get down to the sea (it was pure jungle and granite boulders back then). His host gamely grabbed a couple of machetes and they

hacked their way through the trees, vines and plants until they stumbled across a cave. Inside, they found candles and incense stubs, evidence that local monks had formerly used the cave as a meditation retreat. This was John's eureka moment. He felt the spirituality of the place and begged Karina to come and see it for herself. This was where they could create their own vision of a healing retreat. She came; she too fell in love and the rest, as they say, is history.



Today, the Arjan cave is still so much part of the Kamalaya story. Enter any time you like and light some incense, sit for a few minutes and just be. The heartfelt purpose of Kamalaya – and what underlies most of its philosophy – is about slowing down, calming down and reconnecting with yourself, all abilities we lose in our frenetic lives. You might have filled in a questionnaire and chosen one of their award-winning programmes, but that doesn't mean that once you've spoken about your desires, your worries, your health concerns with one of the doctors, your programme can't be altered to allow you to get the very best from your stay here. Some people

confuse wanting to detox and lose weight with actually just needing comfort and nurture; some come wanting to do every physical activity on offer, but really require the calming therapies of yoga, qi gong and pranayama. The staff at Kamalaya will help you realise what you really need.



Recently, in line with our awakening knowledge about the gut and how it can impact all aspects of health, they have introduced a special ‘enriched gut’ programme. When we are stressed our body is in fight or flight mode, enlisting hormones such as cortisol to keep us on high alert; that in turn draws on the strength of glands such as the thyroid and adrenals which during prolonged periods of stress can then tire and deplete. As all the hormonal cavalry tries to keep up with this stressed state, it means that other areas get neglected, digestion being one of them. If we can’t produce enough digestive enzymes then food sits in our gut and over time the gut lining can get inflamed – which in turn can lead to a leaky gut. The symptoms of this can be any number of afflictions from IBS to sudden food intolerances.





[Kamalaya's programme](#) can offer you the first steps to reversing this (to properly heal a leaky gut might take three months or more). Firstly, cutting out any potential aggravators such as wheat, gluten, dairy, alcohol and caffeine will help calm the digestive system. Thankfully, the food at Kamalaya is so fresh, delicious and bountiful you'll never know what you're missing – heaped bowls of fresh or steamed vegetables (fruit is best avoided) for breakfast, taken with pumpkin humous or mashed avocado and drizzled with apple cider vinegar (a great digestive aid – has to be the 'mother' version) and extra virgin olive oil is a vitamin boosting start to the day and much more tasty than it sounds (though there are of course other things – rosemary breads and beetroot relish, kitchari, eggs any which way); lunch might be a garden salad of rocket, avocado, pumpkin seeds, lettuce, tamarind and a side of grilled tuna; supper, you might fancy an emerald green silky soup of spinach, courgette, green bean, broccoli, coriander, mint, parsley, tarragon, coconut oil, lemongrass, galangal and kefir lime leaves or detox dumplings made with sweet potato, ginger, wasabi, spinach, coconut milk and dried herbs. Take your fill of turmeric

shots, fresh ginger or mulberry tea and a twice daily freshly prepared gut drink. Sit at a table on your own looking out to sea or join the communal table where fellow residents from all walks of life share stories, no judgement.

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The treatments are all devised to stimulate the gut and rid it of anything that's just been sitting there, so lots of colon massages and stretching; yoga helps rinse the organs; pranayama classes help focus the mind and teach you tricks to use when you feel stressed; cupping aids blood circulation and acupuncture calms the nervous system.



Being at Kamalaya is like being filled up from the cup of goodness; your eyes drink in the lush greenery, the glittering sea and wide open sky; your ears are caressed by the chirruping of birds, the running of water and the soft breeze in the trees; your body is nourished with healing foods; your mind is calmed by taking your time, reflecting a moment, being grateful that

you're here. All of this enhanced by doctors and therapists who are intuitive and set you on the right path, by staff who smile and are forward-thinking, by classes such as meditation, pranayama, yoga, circuits, reformer pilates and fitness ball that you can dip in and out of at will. But, above all, this is a place to just 'be'. Its spirituality felt in each step and rustle of the leaves, each lantern lit at night and each waft of citronella. Clever John for finding this place in the jungle. He found a gem.

BOOK IT

Healing Holidays ([healingholidays.com](http://healingholidays.com); 020 3372 6447) can arrange a 7 night Enriched Gut programme from £3,995.00 per person sharing. This includes British Airways flights, transfers, full board accommodation and inclusions of the Enriched Gut programme.