

ASIA'S TOP 10 CULINARY SPA JOURNEYS

Writer Mabs Potter

As an increasing number of spa-goers become aware of how important wholefoods are in their wellness agenda and the slow food movement of farm-to-table ethic swells, spa resorts are responding by offering an ever increasing number of culinary-based retreats, coupled with pampering spa experiences. With a wealth of cultural heritage to draw upon, Asian resorts need not look further than their own backyard to create indigenous and local foodie experiences for their guests. Whether it be an on-site cooking school, a bespoke dining experience in an awe-inspiring setting or a detoxifying cleanse, locally raised and indigenous ingredients are amply used to both nourish the body and the spirit.



Absolute Sanctuary, Thailand

Known for its premier detox, yoga, spa and lifestyle programmes, Absolute Sanctuary, located on the northern tip of the beautiful island of Koh Samui, puts great emphasis on its supremely healthy cuisine. By sourcing locally grown organic produce and nutritionally dense super foods, the renowned Love Kitchen supports the healthy mission of the resort by providing a tantalising array of homemade dishes to suit any taste and dietary requirement. The transformational and empowering Glow Retreat with Natalie Bondine highlights the detoxifying benefits of raw foods through cooking classes and a fully-supported nutritional cleanse that includes therapeutic yoga sessions, wellness talks and guided meditation. Included in the retreat are a soothing array of customised massage and body treatments at the Absolute Spa to support the detox process. www.absolutesanctuary.com

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Alila Villas Uluwatu, Bali

Atop a majestic plateau on the southern coast of Bali sits the modern Alila Villas Uluwatu, which not only blends seamlessly and sustainably with their cliff top surroundings, but also offers sweeping views of the Indian Ocean. The award-winning resort embraces an ethic of eco-consciousness in all aspects, including its Journeys by Alila, which aim to give guests unique experiences in the indigenous communities in which the resort is located. The Journey of Gastronomy offers guests the chance to experience local ingredients, markets, recipes, cooking methods and organic gardening first-hand. The journey begins with a vegetable and fish market tour, followed by a hands-on cooking class and concludes with a feast of the very dishes prepared. When not cooking or exploring the markets, guests can relax in their private pool villa and enjoy a multitude of customised and holistic spa treatments, which feature local herbs, spices and oils. www.alilahotels.com

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Conrad Bali

Known for its classic luxury, the Conrad Bali on the southern coast of Bali features spacious tropical gardens and a pristine beach. Guests may choose to sun on the relaxing sands, but may also lounge poolside at Conrad's many designer pools. But for those wanting a romantic day trip, the bespoke Classic High Tea experience combines a scenic gourmet picnic with customised massage treatments. Guests are whisked away to the highlands where an exclusive tent is set up in a secluded and breathtaking spot and where guests can enjoy a soothing al fresco foot or full body massage, followed by a lavish picnic lunch served by private butlers. As the sun sets, the divine day comes to a close and guests are transported back to the Conrad to enjoy a tranquil dinner by the ocean. www.conradbali.com



Angsana Balaclava, Mauritius

On the north western tip of Mauritius amidst the vast Indian Ocean on a gentle bay with white sand beaches sits the five-star Angsana Balaclava Mauritius. The exclusive resort fuses Asian and African design aesthetics crafted by local artisans with an utterly al fresco experience thanks to the pool suites, which open out onto the private beach. To celebrate the heritage of the local cuisine and ingredients, and with a nod to the Angsana Spa where a plethora of Ayurvedic treatments can be enjoyed, the Epicurean Delight Program, led by the resort's Mauritian chef, begins with an assessment of guests' tri-dosha type. The session continues with a talk on infusions, smoked foods, regional spices and medicinal herbs, followed by a local market tour and a visit to a nearby vegetable garden and fruit orchard where guests are encouraged to explore, pick and taste. The comprehensive hands-on cooking lesson concludes with insight from the chef on wine pairing to suit the dishes prepared. www.angsana.com

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Mandarin Oriental Sanya, China

Fringing a private bay, on the southern shore of balmy Hainan Island in the South China Sea lies the luxurious Mandarin Oriental Sanya resort. The Spa is known for its relaxing open layout, which includes deluxe treatment rooms, featuring a private sauna and an outdoor tub. Multiple reflection pools, set amidst lush tropical gardens with a modern Asian design, contribute to the soothing ambience. Guests can indulge in the Oriental Secret experience, a six-hour blissful journey, which begins and ends with ample time for hydrotherapy in the waterfall whirlpool, secluded bathhouse and many relaxation salas. Massage treatments ensue with a foot ritual, a four-hand massage and a facial, including an eye treatment. The pièce de résistance is an authentic Shaolin Zen Tea Ceremony where renowned Master Hu will demonstrate the art of preparing and drinking tea to nourish and harmonise body and mind.

www.mandarinoriental.com



Shreyas, India

Outside of Bangalore in the quiet Indian countryside is the holistic and luxurious Shreyas retreat, which is known for its personalised contemplative retreat experiences. Guests are welcomed into this non-denominational spiritual oasis and can choose to stay in well-appointed pool or garden cottages that are surrounded by lush landscape. At this exclusively vegetarian resort, the seven-night Culinary and Spa Experience begins with the philosophy of Indian cuisine and its intrinsic tie to spirit, nature and self-nourishment. Through hands-on cooking classes, harvesting visits to the resorts 20-acre organic farm and local markets, tips on holistic kitchen management and traditional Indian table setting and service, and an opportunity to serve a meal to children at a local orphanage, guests will be fully immersed in the experience. Ayurvedic spa treatments and personalised yoga and mediation sessions round out the holistic nature of this retreat for the soul. www.shreyasretreat.com



Hotel de la Paix, Laos

Nestled in the northwest corner of Laos near the golden triangle area of surrounding Burma and Thailand, Hotel de la Paix in peaceful Luang Prabang is a seamless fusion of modern aesthetics within a thoroughly historical context. Aiming to give guests a true taste of the indigenous Laotian culture, both the Spa Indochine and the Ka-Toke Cooking School offer traditional recipes and traditions to soothe the body and the mind. Beginning with a guided market tour where local herbs and vegetables are procured, guests are then invited to don chef whites and chop, cook and savour the many flavours of the best dishes that the area has to offer. After the cooking session, guests are free to relax in the spa, where fresh, natural ingredients are blended in traditional beauty recipes and employed in ancient healing methods. www.hoteldelapaixlp.com

Anantara Golden Triangle Resort & Spa, Thailand

Amidst the lush jungle of Northern Thailand with spectacular views across the Mekong River to both Laos and Burma, Anantara Golden Triangle Resort & Spa offers luxurious accommodation in traditional Thai style. With a commitment to the local community, the resort is known for its famed Elephant Camp, where Thai elephants retire with their mahouts from a previous logging career. With the Discovery Experience, guests can experience a day in the life of an elephant, indulge in an Anantara Spa treatment, tour the countryside and delve into the world of Thai cookery at the on-site Lanna Cooking School. The culinary experience begins with a market tour and in-depth explanation of the art of harmonising the piquant flavours and textures of traditional Thai cuisine. The hands-on cooking class commences, following a picnic at the famed Teak Temple and is led by the resort's skilled chefs. www.goldentriangle.anantara.com



Tanjong Jara Resort, Malaysia

On the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia and bordered by the South China Sea lies the traditionally crafted Tanjong Jara Resort built to resemble 17th century Malay palaces and boasting service that is fit for royalty. With a wealth of culinary heritage in the cuisine and an award-winning spa, the resort has created the Santapan Retreat to offer guests the opportunity to experience the best of both. All meals highlight the unique ingredients and cooking methods of Eastern Malaysian cuisine, while guests can practice making their own dishes in the Terengganu cooking class. A local food tour of Dungun town highlights key ingredients, which are raised nearby and used in the cooking class. Included daily spa treatments are intrinsically Malay by incorporating indigenous flowers, roots, leaves and spices with spiritual rituals, such as floral baths and body steaming to complete the sensory-filled retreat. www.tanjongjararesort.com

Surf Haven Bali

Centrally located, but in a quiet lane of Seminyak, Bali, the luxury villas of Surf Haven Bali are just minutes from the beach and include 24/7 personal butlers. Originally known for its all female surf camps, the haven is now offering a complete food and wellness getaway for women who would rather focus on food and wellness than surf. With personal service in mind, the newly created Rejuvenation Week emphasises restorative experiences with a focus on food outings and cooking classes, yoga, meditation, spa treatments and fitness. Guests can choose from paddle boarding, mountain biking, rice paddy walks, spa sessions, cooking workshops, guided local market visits and tasting trips. With the rejuvenating nature of food emphasised, a complete well-being guide with signature recipes and nutritional tips is also included in this healthy week-long retreat. www.surfhavenbali.com

