

# Festive detox

Having avoided turkey with all the trimmings in favour of a week-long fast with daily colonics, Alexander Fitzgerald's Christmas holiday was anything but typical. But why would he fly half-way around the world to deprive himself, what did it entail and, crucially, was it all worth it?

**W**hile the nation's stomachs groan collectively and belts are loosened following the annual festive excess, it's a different story some 11 hours east. On the island of Koh Samui in southern Thailand, the only food that makes an appearance for guests at Absolute Sanctuary, a plush, Moroccan-inspired health and yoga resort, is in their minds.

Compiling fantasy menus, dreaming of forsaken mince pies and pining for Christmas pudding is a daily occurrence for participants in the Holistic Ultimate Detox, a seven-day programme in which just about every calorific pleasure is off the menu.

Solids may be contraband but there's plenty to consume each day in the form of specially prepared juices laced with psyllium husk, an intestinal cleanser that clings to the colon walls, retains moisture and softens and loosens the

waste matter, and bentonite clay, which acts like a magnetic sponge and removes toxins from the digestive tract. There is also an Oliver Twist-style vegetable broth; fresh coconut water; and a barrage of herbal nutritional supplements. The programme also includes the not insignificant matter of daily colonic hydrotherapy sessions and relaxing treatments such as massages, skin scrubs and Reiki sessions.

Not for the faint-hearted, then – and a world apart from the usual fly-and-flop Christmas holiday I'm accustomed to. This is an intense programme that produces serious bodily reactions, which is why it is best carried out under the supervision of the medical team on hand at the resort.

It's an unusual – draconian, some might venture – way to spend Christmas,



■ The pool at Absolute Sanctuary (above); a suite at the resort (above right), and Alexander Fitzgerald enjoying a detox drink (below left).

yet for those prepared to invest a week in the human equivalent of an NCT, it is a hugely rewarding one.

Rewards, however, seem a mile away at the initial, pre-detox consultation, where Dr Will, a naturopathic doctor who has worked at the exclusive Chiva Som spa in Hua Hin, assesses participants' medical histories, their health status and, crucially, their reasons for embarking on the week-long programme. At this point, detoxers are also weighed and have their blood pressure and body fat measured, before being given a detailed explanation of programme and its various components.

Warnings are given about potential nausea, mood swings and energy slumps during the initial stages. I feel a stab of pity for my travel companion, my mother, who faces the possibility of enduring, rather than enjoying, my company should I experience any, or even all, of the aforementioned.

So what brings a self-confessed mince pie addict to Absolute Sanctuary and, more

specifically, to participate in its most intense health programme? With the big 40 looming large on the horizon, my reasons for signing up could possibly be construed as the first signs of a midlife crisis. I prefer, however, to view them as a desire to hold on to the look and feel of youth just a little longer. There's also the incentive of enjoying the results that those completing the Ultimate Detox have sworn by: enhanced energy levels, improved digestion – colon hydrotherapy progressively removes years of toxins and impacted waste from the body – weight loss, reduced stress levels and enhanced mental clarity.

My fellow detoxers, a cosmopolitan bunch aged between mid-twenties and early seventies who, thankfully, were the antithesis of the lentil-chomping, hemp-wearing health nuts I had anticipated, had their own tangible goals, including tackling stomach complaints, food allergies and severe constipation. Most were keen to stress – a cynic might say too keen – that losing weight was not the goal. "It's a bit extreme to travel halfway around the world just for a diet," insisted one forty-something Londoner before adding, "Mind you, I wouldn't mind shedding a few pounds."

On paper, certainly, it sounds like a trau-

## GADGETS

### Revolights

What these bike lights lack in brilliant lumens they more than make up for in shiny cool. Revolights deliver a full 360 degrees of high visibility. On each wheel, the Revolight rim has eight 35-lumin LEDs, with removable, rechargeable batteries. A pair of magnets and a built-in accelerometer lets each LED array be synchronised with your speed, blazing out patterned arcs of light front and back. Revolights \$250 (€193) from [revolights.com](http://revolights.com)



### Litre Light Field Camera

Taking a Lytro snap doesn't capture a frame in the traditional way. It reads information about where the light is travelling from, the "light field". Then it stores all this data and allows you to focus your shots after they're taken. Weird. And amazing. The Lytro is at its earliest stages of development, so there are shortcomings. The viewing screen is too low a resolution to do other than shoot and hope for the best. And the output is moderated through Lytro's own software. Still, the first time you retro-focus on a different part of an existing Lytro image and it goes pin sharp, dropping everything else to soft, it's pretty mind-bending. Lytro Light Field Camera \$499 (€386) from [lytro.com](http://lytro.com)



matic week, and one that would require Herculean levels of will-power. However, aided by daily temperatures in the mid-thirties and a host of pampering treatments, the seven days passed surprisingly quickly and, for the most part, without hardship.

Energy levels on days one and two were sufficiently high to participate in 90-minute yoga classes and enjoy swims in both the clear blue South China sea and the resort's stunning infinity pool. On day three, which is said to be the most challenging, the mother of all headaches kicked in. Thoughts of food, meanwhile, danced a merry and relentless jig across my mind; the temptation to sneak even a small mouthful of fruit proved difficult, but not, rather pleasingly, impossible, to resist.

Things picked up immeasurably by day five, however. A nearly detoxified brain and bloodstream meant I awoke clear-headed and brimming with energy. The colonic now produced less than on previous days, but it was darker in colour as the fast had broken away the older, more ingrained plaque. And hunger, believe it or not, became refreshingly irrelevant, as my body became used to receiving purely what it needed to survive.

Further improvements, both mental and

physical, followed on the last couple of days when I felt fresh as a proverbial daisy. Remarkably, without nibbling a single shred of solid food, the penultimate colonic still washed out an impressive amount of gunk. Better out than in, though, as they say.

By the end of the week, the fast was being credited by my fellow detoxers with impressive results. In addition to varying degrees of weight loss, it had, they claimed, got rid of allergies, eased sinus problems and, in one case, severe period pains. For my part, I'd shed almost 4kg, I had an indecent amount of energy and truly felt rejuvenated, and more supple.

The first post-detox meal of papaya made my toes curl with pleasure, but, as George Bernard Shaw sagely observed, "Any fool can fast, but it takes a wise man to break a fast properly". While the temptation was to make up for lost time (and calories) and load up on green curries and Pad Thai – it was raw fruit and vegetables for the next few days, before more substantial foodstuffs could be introduced.

Crossing the finish line did indeed feel marvellous. Bronzed from a steady stream of sunshine, toned from challenging yoga classes, pampered by massages and treatments, the results were undeniably impres-

sive. By the end of the week I felt completely relaxed and thoroughly cleansed.

With 2013 just days away, many will have New Year's resolutions of activating gym memberships, going on diets or simply promising to take better care of themselves. Mine? To return to Samui sooner rather than later for a second Ultimate Detox.

## ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

**Getting there:** Koh Samui is a one-hour flight from Bangkok. Flights from Ireland vary depending on the time of year, but cost between €800–€1,200. Further details at [skyscanner.ie](http://skyscanner.ie)

**Prices:** An eight-night stay at Absolute Sanctuary including a seven-day Holistic Ultimate Detox and airport collection and drop-off costs Bt77,500 (€1,987) for single occupancy and Bt125,400 (€3,205) for double occupancy.

**Further details:** Absolute Sanctuary, Choeng Mon Beach, 84320, Koh Samui, Thailand. See [absolutesanctuary.com](http://absolutesanctuary.com); tel: 0066-77-601190

### Turtle Shell Boombox

The Turtle Shell is a wireless speaker that uses Bluetooth to pair up with a player, all encased in a tough IPX6-rated waterproof case. It's made to attach to your bike or, say, a buggy, with a standard camera threading to use with a variety of grips. Turtle Shell Boombox \$225 (€174) [outdoortechnology.com](http://outdoortechnology.com)

