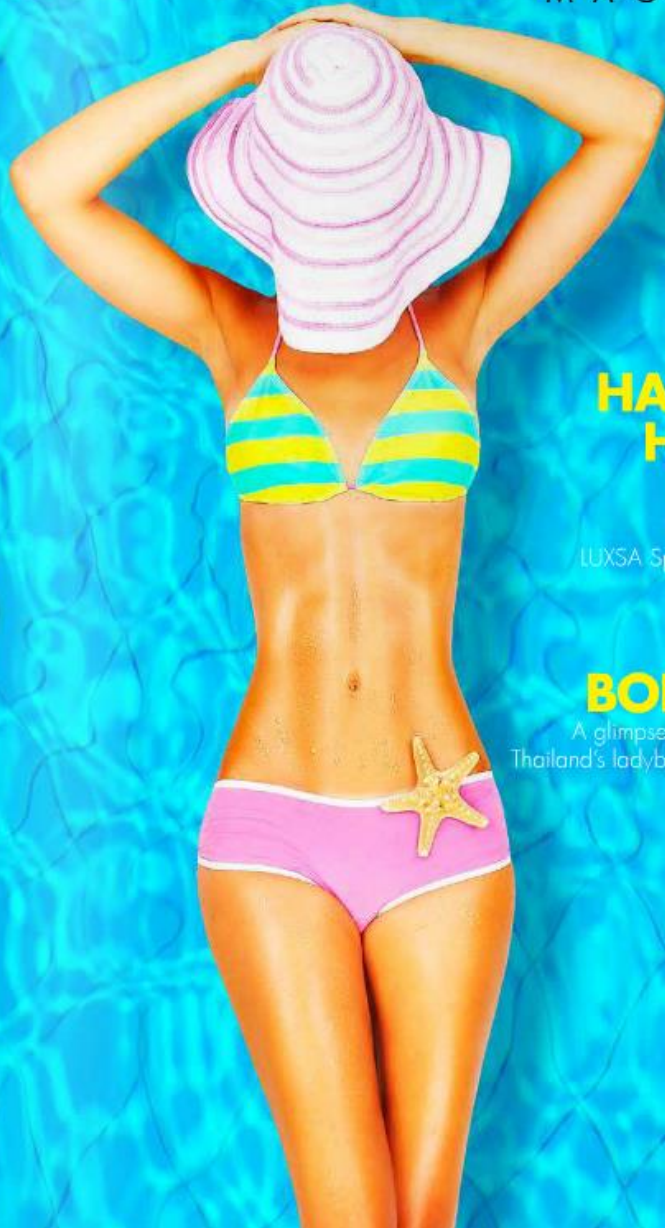


SAMUI HOLIDAY

MAGAZINE



HANSAR'S HELPING HANDS

There's a lot more to LUXSA Spa than just healing.

BORN FREE

A glimpse into what motivates Thailand's ladyboys – the 'third sex'.



CORE CONCEPTS

Absolute Sanctuary's latest ideas put fitness well within your reach.



Now in its seventh year, Absolute Sanctuary is an immensely popular spa, and people come here from all over the world. Some come for their detox programs, others for yoga or Pilates or still others for the anti-stress and burnout packages. Of course, you can always come for a simple spa session – they do excellent massages here. It's called a sanctuary because it's exactly that, a place to get away from the world where you can concentrate on the essentials and get a new understanding of how to feel fitter, healthier and more relaxed. For some people, it's going to be a turning point in their lives coming here, while others are simply going to come for the benefit of having an increased sense of wellbeing. Absolute Sanctuary is located north of Chaweng, follow Chaweng Beach Road north, bend round to the right and carry on past the airport turnoff until you see the sign.

The spa could easily keep to its repertoire. After all, it's got to that stage where many institutions might just want to rest on their laurels. But Absolute Sanctuary remains sharp to its purpose, and is always improving on what it offers, adding an important new addition to its already extensive programmes. It's been able to do this due to its unique position as part of the successful Absolute Yoga Group that operates Absolute Yoga, Absolute Pilates and Absolute Fit Food in Bangkok.

I spoke to Claire Bostock-Huang about Absolute Sanctuary's newest addi-

ons. Claire's a prominent figure at Absolute Sanctuary, and used to be a banker before she got into yoga, and decided to become a teacher. This led her to Bangkok where she started working with Absolute Yoga. The group asked her to help set up Absolute Sanctuary on Samui, and she's been deeply involved with it ever since.

"We've introduced two exercise systems that we already have in Bangkok and have run these successfully for more than five years," says Claire. "These are Group Core Suspend and Group Pilates Reformer classes." Unless you're familiar with the physical fitness world, then these terms won't mean anything to you. Claire gives a very succinct explanation. "People are looking for more fitness in their holidays. When they recognize they need to strengthen their core," she explains that 'core' is often misunderstood. It doesn't just mean those six-pack abs you're trying to get or keep, it's more than that. It's the whole globe of muscles that stretch round your mid-section. Says Claire, "Think of the area that a typical corset covers – that's the core. It also includes the oblique muscles and those of the back. Sure, you'll look a lot better if you don't have a paunch, but it's more than just how your waistline looks." "Once the core is strong and well-developed, then – exactly as the word suggests – you have the fundamentals correct, balance and posture are going to be much better, and you'll already be fitter and really feel it."



Claire goes on to say, "Absolute Pilates in Bangkok invented the Pilates Reformer GX (group experience) classes, and we brought the concept and the programming to the resort. We are also the first to bring to Thailand the Group Core Suspend classes, with our own unique programming. Due to the popularity and trend of fitness holidays, and our success with these exercise systems in Bangkok, we decided to transfer these and introduce them at the resort on Samui. Pilates are traditionally done one-on-one with the instructor, but now we have the reformer machines, which boost performance and efficiency. This means you can get seriously fit in a shorter time than you would normally." The machines look difficult to fathom out, and aren't anything like the traditional machines you see in gyms. And there are no weights either. Thirty minutes is all it takes to become familiar with them, what they can do and how they can help you. A foundation session is therefore a must before you get stained. Classes after that are an hour long.

"Absolute Pilates has transformed the way Pilates is taught, by teaching group reformer classes with safe and effective programs to target various parts of your body such as abs and arms, butt and thigh or the whole body. It's effectively resistance training," says Claire. "The key to working out on the reformer is that your muscles become longer as you work them both concentrically and eccentrically, with the resistance from the spring pulley system of the reformer machine, allowing you to achieve a long, lean and toned body which is what everyone wants to have."

Absolute Sanctuary's Group Core Suspend, meanwhile, is a system that

is all in to TRX training, except there are two separate drops, rather than just the one. Again, it's a very efficient way to get fit, and a lot more pleasant than being at a traditional gym.

Classes for Group Core Suspend and Group Pilates Reformer are held every day except Saturday, with four classes per day. The classes may be general or target specific areas. They're held in the Reformer Studio, an air-cooled minimalist room. Classes are limited to six people for the Group Pilates Reformer and four for Group Core Suspend, so if you're interested, you'll certainly need to book in advance.

Absolute Sanctuary has also upped the ante regarding the food in their restaurant, the Love Kitchen. Says Claire, "The concept we have introduced in the Love Kitchen is a Superfoods Menu inspired by Absolute Fit Food in Bangkok. The Love Kitchen previously focused on spa cuisine, but with the introduction of our new Superfoods Menu it has brought healthy dining to a new level. It does this by focusing on premium ingredients such as superfoods, wholefoods, hormone-free meats, ocean-catch fish, and so on. All sauces and dressings are homemade." This is food that's totally good for you and will promote your fitness.

Ah, but all, what's the good of doing sport, yoga and boosting your stamina and muscles if you then indulge in mediocre food? And we're not simply talking about Coke and doughnuts here, but food that may appear healthy, but which can still be rather poor. Take Caesar salad, for example. Most people would rank that as something healthy to eat,

but it can certainly be improved on. Look at the dressing - that's definitely not so healthy. At Absolute Sanctuary, the Caesar dressing for their Chicken Caesar Roll uses chia seeds and yoghurt to give the same flavour, but make it good for you. A stark difference from the typical fatty version made from eggs and mayonnaise. Absolute Sanctuary, by the way, uses spelt flour as it's easier to digest and causes less inflammation of the gut than wheat flour. The restaurant's menu will win you over; you can also try a three-course tasting menu. I'll make you realize that even if you diet is, say, 80% healthy, you can boost that statistic fairly easily and without sacrificing on taste. Particularly recommended are signature dishes, such as Absolute Seafood Guinea Poultry, 3-Bean Guinea Salad, BIT burrito, and Slim Guinea Partridge.

If you visit Absolute Sanctuary, you'll find plenty of inspiration on both the food and fitness fronts. Unless you really have studied both in great depth, you're bound to come away with new ideas or even a whole new perspective on how to maximise your health. And they'll show you that it's not difficult to go to the next level of fitness and healthy eating.

Dimitri Waring

For further information, telephone 0 7760 1190.
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